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STARLOG PRESENTS

COMICS scene

JANUARY
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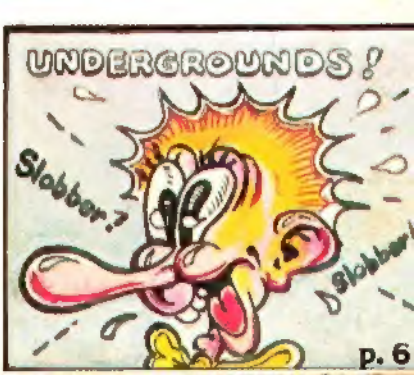
Interviews with Stan Lee and Jim Shooter



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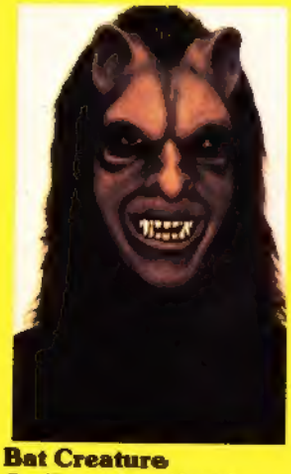

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STARLOG PRESENTS

COMICS scene

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JANUARY

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About the cover: Photographer John Clayton found Stan Lee and Jim Shooter tough subjects to shoot since they had all these crazy characters popping into the conference room. To get the right feel, former Marvel artist Billy Graham rendered the characterizations for our premiere cover. The Phantom © 1981 King Features Syndicate; Bugs Bunny © 1981 Warner Bros.; Zap head © 1968 Apex Novelties Inc., from cover of **Zap** #2; all other characters © 1981 Marvel Comics Group, a division of Cadence Industry Corporation.

Word Balloons

Why?

The idea of doing a comics magazine has been brewing around our offices for two or three years. Several members of our editorial staff are enthusiastic comics fans—the foremost being STARLOG editor Howard Zimmerman, who has a magnificent personal collection and has written a magazine column on comics for many years.

That's why I asked Howard to serve as Editor-in-Chief of COMICS SCENE.

The recent generator behind this magazine is a young man who joined our staff just over a year ago—coming from DC Comics—Bob Greenberger. He is the fellow who started pushing me (the end of last year) to get excited about a top-quality, full color, totally professional publication—about comics.

That's why I asked Bob to serve as Editor of COMICS SCENE.

Why, you may ask, did we decide to start a magazine that is designed to be THE authoritative source of news and information—THE forum of interviews and ideas—THE marketplace for dealers, publishers and collectors—THE showcase for writers and artists and businesspersons who make the comics world spin?

In short, why did Starlog Press (whose reputation lies in science fiction and horror) presume to produce THE BIBLE of the comics news field? Well...

I attend a lot of fan conventions—mostly science fiction—and at every one I find more interest in comics than any other single subject. The dealers' room is always dominated by comics; the art show displays promising fan cartoonists; several superheros always show up in the costume parade; and the hallway conversations seem to crackle with talk of comics collecting and comics creating.

I believe there is a large, lively audience for comics—just as there was for science fiction six years ago before STARLOG appeared. Nobody knew it then. In fact, nobody really believed the SF "underground" amounted to anything. But we did and George Lucas did, and guess who was right. Sadly, that same unaware attitude is what we've run into again.

"The comics field is in a slump!" "The audience is too small!" "Is there a *need* for a newsstand comics magazine?" All right—one at a time...

Yes, the comics field is in a slump—mainly because the *quality* of the comics product is not high enough. One of our purposes in COMICS SCENE will be to crusade for excellence. The field needs higher creative and production standards if it hopes to reverse the downward trend.

Sure, the audience is too small. There's only 25-million comics sold every month in the U.S.—plus hundreds of newspaper strips and one-panels—plus a handful of animated movies each year and a dozen hours a week of animated TV programming—plus many, many comics fanzines, conventions, specialty stores and a collector market that is quietly BOOMING. Small? Sure...

Yes, there *is* a need for a professional comics magazine. We are not going to put any fanzines or newsletters out of business. All the comics publications that currently exist serve a good and vital purpose, and we will support them in the pages of this magazine. But they simply are not geared for worldwide news coverage, for four-color reproduction, for the expense of career writers and journalists, and, mainly, they do not have the mass-circulation that COMICS SCENE does. They represent a more personal network of kindred souls while we represent the vast comics mainstream.

I will not regularly write an opening editorial for COMICS SCENE, as I do in STARLOG and FUTURE LIFE, but in this Premiere Issue I wanted to give you some of the reasons why we decided to do this magazine and indicate some of our goals.

If you have read any of our other publications, you know that we are not hidden up in our Manhattan skyscraper, out of touch with the fan community. We read every letter that arrives, we go to conventions, we listen, we participate—we are *part of* the world that our magazines cover.

The same is true of the comics world. We are here to give you the most important and exciting magazine we can design, and we are always eager to hear your reactions and your suggestions for the future. *You* can have an effective hand in making this new magazine valuable to yourself and to the field.

Welcome to the wonderful COMICS SCENE!

Kerry O'Quinn/Publisher

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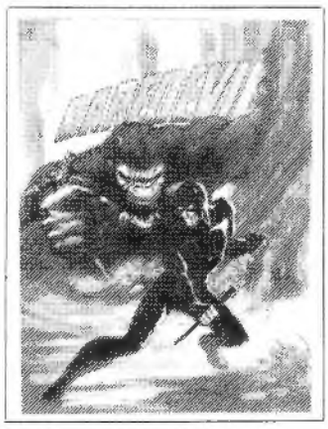

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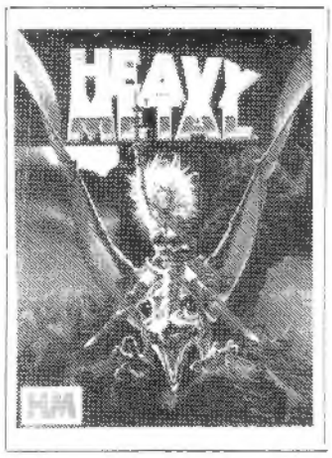

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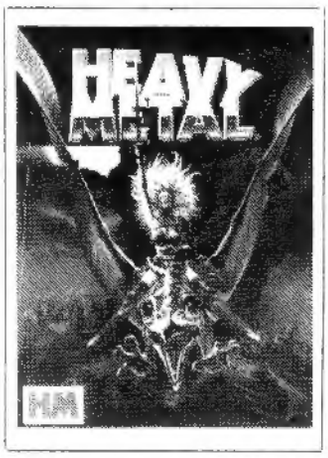

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Comics Reporter

Art: © 1981 Steve Gerber & Jack Kirby

Eclipse Enterprises

Destroyer Duck to Premiere This Month

Eclipse Enterprises will be releasing *Destroyer Duck* this month, featuring the talents of Steve Gerber, Jack Kirby, Neal Adams, Alfredo Alcala, Sergio Aragones, Marty Pasko, Mark Evanier, and Scott Shaw!

All the contributors to this highly-touted 32 page, $1.50, four-color comic have donated their time and efforts to help raise funds for Gerber's law suit against Marvel Comics for the ownership of *Howard the Duck* (see next story).

Publisher Dean Mullaney discussed the book over lunch, as well as future plans for Eclipse, one of the huge alternate publishing successes in recent years. Mullaney happily describes the comic, which is being printed at World Color Press just like Marvel and DC Comics, as just plain fun. The lead feature in the comic is the 20 page story of Destroyer Duck, who comes from another space-time continuum, seeking vengeance for the death of "the little guy," his friend. The fact that Howard also came to Earth from another space-time continuum is merely coincidental.

The "Manslaying Mallard" finds himself pitted against Godcorp Ltd. described by Gerber as "an unliving entity, incapable of creation, dedicated solely to its ambition to acquire everything on earth—at bargain prices." Destroyer Duck savagely battles Godcorp's assassins promising a slam-bang wind-up and a chance to see Kirby choreograph battles of cataclysmic roportions.

Gerber wrote the story, of course, and Kirby did the pencils, after recovering from an accident. Inking the cover is Adams and the interiors will be inked by Alcala.

Filling out the book will be smaller features such as Aragones' *Groo the Wanderer*, a send-up of the sword and sorcery comics, and Great Moments in Comic Book History by Evanier and Pasko.

Mullaney also mentioned that *Sabre* will be going into its third printing and it will sport a new Paul Gulacy cover. Future issues of *Eclipse*, he asserts, will probably be receiving higher print runs since the distributors keep selling out. The magazine has been successful at keeping to a bimonthly schedule and Mullaney is now planning other new magazines.

And if *Destroyer Duck* is as big a success as all concerned believe it to be, Mullaney wants to go full-speed ahead with a series of comics. One of them will probably be a super-hero group that would be better and different than the current offerings from DC and Marvel. The much-talked about Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers reworking of the *Madame Xanadu* stories, which Englehart pulled back from DC, will be released as an Eclipse miniseries. There is talk that Michael Kaluta may do the covers. The comics would be printed at World Color and be sold through direct sales just as Pacific Comics is doing with *Captain Victory* and *Starslayer*.

Finally, by the time you read this, Jim Starlin's *The Price* should be on sale. This is another chapter in Starlin's sprawling *Metamorphosis Odyssey* epic.

ART © 1981 DC Comics

Arion to back-up Warlord

When Paul Levitz's *Dragon Sword* completes its run in *Warlord* #54, a new sword and sorcery series will begin. *Arion of Atlantis* takes place, according to creator/scripter Paul Kupperberg, during an ice age some 45,000 years ago.

In this world, Kupperberg explains, magic instead of science is the basis for Atlantis' advanced technology. The magical technology they have developed has been in existence for half a million years. When this supernatural knowledge first took hold, space ships were launched to the stars for further exploration. The ships have never returned, "at least not yet," Kupperberg says.

Ruling Atlantis is King T'Chulluh, aided by Arion Lord High Mage. Other major cast members include Chian, Captain of the Royal Guards, and Wyynde, Lieutenant to Chian.

Aiding Kupperberg is artist Jan Duursema who takes on her first series for DC. So far, Kupperberg, who also scripts *Supergirl* and *Jimmy Olsen*, has been doing the plots by himself but he thinks Duursema will start contributing soon. Guiding the two is *Warlord* editor Laurie Sutton.

Howard—the Movie Update

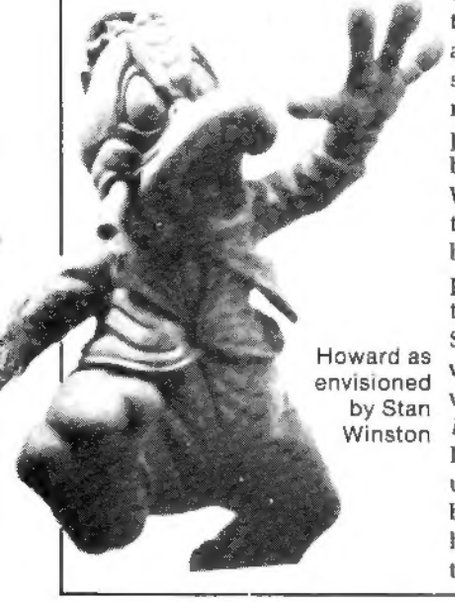
For all the legal problems that have surrounded its conception, the movie version of *Howard the Duck* appears to be proceeding along as planned.

According to Morrie Eisenman, producer of *Howard*, the film has not been, and will not be affected by the law suit against Marvel; and as Eisenman puts it, they're on a "normal time schedule."

The main reason H.T.D. (that's Howard The Duck) Productions won't be touched by the litigation, except for the submission of depositions, is that when the rights were acquired from Marvel, the agreement carried an indemnity clause which stated that Marvel would bare any and all responsibility should something such as this law suit arise.

The only forseeable problem, Eisenman feels, would be a possible slow-down caused by the movie studios not wanting to back the project in light of the pending legal action. In any case, things are moving on *Howard*, and at press time, a new draft of the script by Edwin Heaven is still in preparation.

Stan Winston, the man in charge of creating Howard's persona for the screen, maintained that nothing on his end of the project had changed—that is, he is still working on the development of the character. He has now finished several sculpted and painted models of the duck in various poses and is awaiting a script before going much further. Winston told FANGORIA over the summer, "Howard would be a combination of suit and puppetry; a combination of the technology that went into Stuart Freeborn's Yoda that went into Chewbacca, that went into my wookies and *The Exterminator*, and everything I've learned so far. He'll be the ultimate puppet. He should become a household word; he's really a wonderful character."



Howard as envisioned by Stan Winston

Marvel

1982 Plans Set—Four Titles to Debut

In August, Jim Shooter outlined Marvel's publishing plans for 1982. Included were the premiere of four new titles, a minimum of three mini-series to run four months apiece and four movie adaptations to appear in what he calls "A multi-format blitz."

The first of the new comics is *G.I. Joe*, set to premiere in January. Marvel has been working closely with Hasbro on redesigning the line of action dolls with a wide range of accessories. Hasbro's deal with Marvel includes an extensive national television advertising campaign to promote the comic book. The book will be edited by Tom DeFalco with Archie Goodwin serving as a consulting editor. Goodwin edited Warren's classic *Blazing Combat* magazine in the early 1960s and many of DC's war comics during the early 1970s. Writing the comic will be Larry Hama who had army training in explosive ordinance. Herb Trimpe and Bob McLeod are the art team. Shooter first introduced the title as a one-shot but then mentioned it would be a series.

Coming a month later will be *Team America*, again inspired by a toy, this time from Ideal. The toys and comic will involve motorcycles, strange vehicles and a lot of action. The first issue was plotted by Shooter and will be scripted by Denny O'Neil. No art team has been assigned.

Both Wonder Man and Ant Man will be receiving their own titles in the spring. Neither comic has an official creative team but it's logical to expect David Michelinie to be involved with one or both books. It was Michelinie who revived Ant Man in the form of ex prisoner, now Stark International engineer, Scott Lang. Michelinie's solo Wonder Man story in *Marvel Premiere* last year sold well enough to encourage Marvel to go ahead with a solo book.

The first of the mini-series, premiering in January, will be *Wolverine* by Chris Claremont and "probably" Frank Miller. The next four-issue series will be the *Vision and the Scarlet Witch*, tying up threads from the Celestial Madonna storyline, by Bill Mantlo and Bill Sienkewicz. May will see the introduction of the Bob Layton solo effort on *Hercules* and finally, October will feature the second religious biography comic. Mary Jo Duffy has scripted the life of Pope John Paul II and the team of Marie Severin and John Tartaglione will do the art.

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A MEETING OF MINDS

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With plans to adapt *Rocky III* permanently shelved and the *Conan* adaptation delayed until the film's release in the spring, Marvel is unsure of what the fourth movie adaptation will be. The other two definitely set for spring 1982 are *Annie* (with work from Leonard Starr) and *Blade Runner*. The latter will be written by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson is considering handling the art chores.

Shooter also said that the sagging sales have not improved on *Star Trek* and the comic will be cancelled with issue 18, on sale in November.

There will be 12 annuals next summer including *Iron Man* co-plotted by Bob Layton. Although he has left the book's regular team, Layton will do the occasional special story. Shooter also announced which comics will receive 48 page, $1 double issues. They are *Daredevil* #181, *Dr. Strange* #55, *Dazzler* #21, *Master of Kung-Fu* #118, *X-Men* #165 and *Fantastic Four* #250.

DC Comics

Giordano Named Managing Editor; Adler Becomes Consultant

Jenette Kahn's reorganization of the DC executive structure in the wake of Sol Harrison's retirement continues as Dick Giordano has been named managing editor and Jack Adler steps out of the executive line-up to become a consultant. Vice-President Joe Orlando takes on the production department under his responsibilities as editorial director. Production manager Bob Rozakis reports to Orlando.

Orlando became managing editor in 1979; during the summer of 1980 he was named editorial director and then rose to Vice President editorial director in the spring of 1981. He now oversees all phases of the company from special projects to comic books to promotion.

Giordano will be responsible for the creative staff of all the comic books and will concentrate on developing new talents for the line. This will mean he will be working very closely with editorial coordinator Karen Berger. Acting as administrative assistant for the two will be Tamsyn O'Flynn, DC's resident proofreader. Replacing her as proofreader will be Carl Gafford, a frequent colorist for DC and Marvel.

Does this promotion mean Giordano will give up his art? "Not at all," he told us by phone in late August. "I refuse to give that up. They'd have to drag me away kicking and clawing. I explained this to them last year and made the point again when this came up."

Two of Giordano's newest books, *Arak* and *Captain Carrot and his Amazing Zoo Crew.*

ART: © 1981 DC Comics

Another thing Giordano is not giving up is the Atari special projects account. "Atari is a personal effort," he explains. "I've made half a dozen trips to San Francisco and there are too many aspects to give up, not the least of which is the personal rapport I have established with them." His other special projects assignments will be given over to other editors.

Giordano's own goal in his new post is "how best we can work in the direct sales market. That's the future of comics in my opinion." He is also working with editors to develop many new titles in the mini- and maxi-series format along with regular comic titles. "We were originally thinking of adding a new title and dropping an existing title at a one-to-one ratio but new information has shown we may add many new titles at one time and drop only a few." He wouldn't say what these new titles were or what was possibly going to be cancelled.

One thing Giordano did say about the procedure used to drop titles is that decisions are not based solely on newsstand sales. Sales mean more than just how they do on the newsstands. Success overseas, for example, can justify a title's continuation.

New Neal Adams Series from Pacific

Pacific Comics is previewing a new series by Neal Adams in *Captain Victory* #3, now on sale. The series, *Ms. Mystic,* will be introduced next spring and Adams will retain rights to the character. Pacific publishers Bill and Steve Schanes feel that the Adams series, the artist's first comic book story since DC's *Superman vs. Muhammad Ali* tabloid in 1977, is one of the most exciting developments in years.

The character of Ms. Mystic first appeared in Adams' *New Heroes* portfolio some years back. Adams explains that "Ms. Mystic presents herself as a witch who lived in the 1700s who was to be burned at the stake. Instead of allowing herself to be burned, she was able, through magical powers which are derived from the earth itself, to transport herself to another dimension, another reality. Unfortunately, she was not able to transport herself back to this reality, so she stayed in that other dimension doing things only ethereally until that particular point when a group of scientists and fighters for the ecology accidentally bring her out of that dimension to our own. She discovers that it's not so much prejudice in the world that's causing things to get screwed up but the very real danger to the earth itself of polluting it to death. She decides that maybe she can lend a helping hand in getting rid of the pollution. The reality of her existence is not that she is a witch; she is very definitely something else which will not be revealed for many, many issues."

Ms. Mystic "draws her power from the light and the darkness, she draws her powers from the earth, the sun and the air. She is in control of the forces of nature, as much as the forces of nature are in control of us. And that's the limit of her powers. As much as the forces of nature are able to control us, she is able in turn to control them." And when Adams describes her enemies as polluters, he is not restricting them to mundane violators. "Ms. Mystic dabbles on the fringes of reality. And the forces she comes up against are also on the fringes of reality. . . . It's really a journey into the realm of imagination, wherever my imagination takes the story, I'll pursue it."

Strips

The Muppet Comics Strip —Yeah!

The Gilchrist brothers of Farmington, Connecticut consider themselves as among the Muppets' most loyal fans. It's with pride that 24-year old Guy recalls Rowlf's early career days on *The Jimmy Dean Show* and *The Ed Sullivan Show*. "We were card-carrying members, still are, of the Muppet Show Fan Club," he reports.

On September 21, Jim Henson's Muppets made their comic strip debut in newspapers across the country. For the Gilchrists, it meant the realization of a dream. Creating these escapades and shaping the characters and physiques of the Muppets themselves are artist-writer Guy and writer Brad.

No newcomers to the field, Guy and 21-year old Brad were avid comic book collectors as youngsters, with their primary interest in the adventures of *Batman*. "The big influences for me as far as art," says Guy, "Walt Kelley's *Pogo* is number one. There's also Disney, Paul Terry of Terrytoons, Will Eisner and Paul Fine."

For years, Guy and Brad were responsible for another barnyard of funny animals. Their *Super Kernal Comics*, published by Xerox Publications, was nationally distributed and reached 300,000 school-aged children. Before that, the Gilchrists were making regular contributions to various game and joke books.

It was through a combination of fate, enthusiasm and hard work that the team was commissioned by King Features Syndicate and Jim Henson Associates to translate the internationally-acclaimed Muppets to daily and Sunday strips.

Both were actively involved with the Museum of Cartoon Art in Portchester, New York and knew its president, cartoonist Mort Walker *(Beetle Baily, Hagar the Horrible, Hi and Lois)*. According to Guy, Walker was playing "an oft repeated game of golf" with King Features' editor Bill Yates. Between holes, Yates mentioned that the Henson people and King Features had yet to find the right combination of talent for a Muppet strip (even Marvel's Marie Severin struck out). Walker suggested that Yates give the Gilchrists a shot and Guy was asked to do up six dailies.

"We wanted to do the kind of comic strip that when we opened up the newspaper, we'd like to see. We approached it our own way," Guy tells. In one evening, he completed 20 pencils of Henson's pride and joys. From that time, in November, until January when Muppet head writer Jerry Juhl phoned to tell them they had the job, Guy delivered 60 more pencils. Since then, the brothers have immersed themselves "in the house that the frog built."

"People think we're limited because of the strip . . . that we can't do a lot of things that they do on the show. But, you can turn that around just as easily. There are a lot of things we *can do*," says Guy, who now works closely with Muppet art director Michael K. Firth to maintain that "universal and classic look of the Muppets."

The Gilchrists' work doesn't end on the printed page. "We've started doing some work in the Muppets product lines to bring the look of the comic strip into some merchandising because now this art concept of the Muppets, our line art, will be the recognizable style of the Muppets as far as merchandising worldwide."

An in-depth interview with the Gilchrists will appear in the second issue of COMICS SCENE .

A sample of the *Muppets* strip and the proud creators: artist writer Guy and writer Brad Gilchrist.

Chipmunks

Alvin Returns for Christmas!

We all know that a Chipmunk revival is happening. But the extent of this revival seems to be far-reaching and the trio of mischevious-but-good-natured brothers will be heading back to television for an NBC Christmas special.

Born in the mind and electronic wizardry of Ross Bagdasarian Sr., the Chipmunks—Alvin, Theodore and Simon—sang and danced their way through 1958-1967. Their albums and animated television series were commercial and financial successes but then Dave Saville (aka Bagdasarian), their leader, decided to retire.

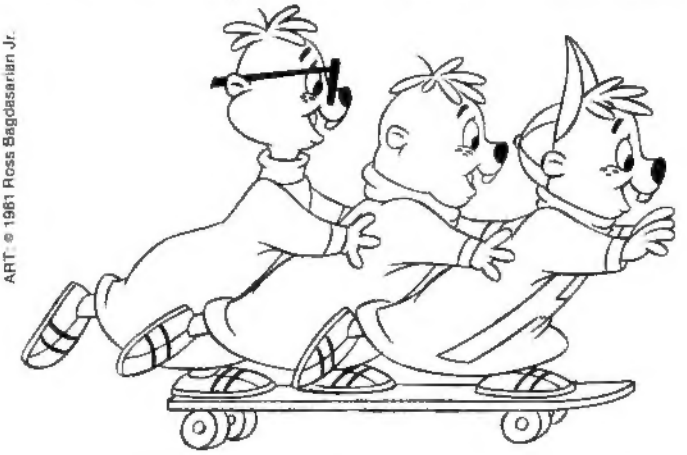
When he died in 1972, his son, Ross Jr., took over the family concerns which included real estate and vineyards, almost ignoring the Chipmunks. After rediscovering his father's creations, Bagdasarian tried to interest record companies or the networks in the Chipmunks in 1977 but the response was less than lukewarm.

It took then-NBC President Fred Silverman, in 1979, to get some national attention redirected towards the group. After mentioning the series to his programming people, the old animated series, which played on CBS during the 1961-62, 1962-63 seasons, was placed on the Saturday Morning schedule that Fall and it did adequately.

Finally, Bagdasarian, in association with Jancie Karman—his wife—produced the hit album, *Chipmunk Punk*, successfully lampooning some of the biggest songs of 1980. This summer saw the release of *Urban Chipmunk*, another spoof.

Kellogg's is fully funding the NBC special for this December which will allow for full character animation instead of the usual limited animation employed on television. The special is being produced by the Bagdasarians and Chuck Jones. With Jones aboard, the couple hopes that the true flavor and spirit of the original Chipmunk animated series will be retained. All three co-wrote the script.

If the show is a hit, NBC will no doubt rush ahead with the next scheduled special, *The Chipmunks at Opryland*. Can more specials and records and toys and games be far behind?



An Overview of the Undergrounds

One of the most active areas in the comics world today is the field of underground comix publishing. With the opening of a large number of comics shops around the country, the undergrounds can be found in more places. In each issue, we'll do our best to keep you abreast of what is coming from the major and minor publishers. In case you can't find the comix you want, we'll include as many addresses as possible.

Bruce Sweeney has provided the following information:

A major piece of "underground" news is that collector-historian Jay Kennedy feels that he is only six months away from publishing a major book. He is presently completing a book that will list all the known underground comics from the late 60s to the present.

The format will be something like the Overstreet guide but not as thick. Bill Griffith has agreed to do the cover and Jay Lynch will be writing a brief history of the undergrounds. The book will feature a color illustration. Over 2000 undergrounds, tabloids and minicomix will be listed. The book will feature an artist cross reference and the book will also double as a price guide. There will be a limited edition available, both signed and numbered.

LAST GASP COMIX
2180 Bryant Street, San Francisco, CA 94110

Cocaine Comix #3 has a Robert Williams cover and S. Clay Wilson back cover, selling for $1.50.

Anarchy #3 is a 48 pager for $2 featuring art by Spain, Kinney, Mavrides, Harper, Helm, Conford, Lafer, Epistolien and Trublin of France. Peter Pontiac did the cover.

Aftershock is due this month with all female material by Robbins, Gebbie and Wilson. Becky Wilson did the cover.

New comer Jeff Christianson has done his first solo book, *Ultra Klutz*. The 36 pager should be out as you read this. Robert Crumb's *Weirdo* #3 should also be out this month. San Francisco #7 will be coming, featuring work by Brand, Beck, Spain, Deitch and previously unpublished material from the late Willy Murphy.

Street Art will feature 140 different posters on 128 pages. Nearly all of the book is by new people with the exception of work by Gary Panter and Paul Mavrides. Selling for $8.95, the book is being printed 8½ x 11".

Finally, Last Gasp will be reprinting the classics *Zap* 0 and *Zap* #1. They will also be publishing the *Zippy 1982 Calendar*, selling for $4.95 with a color cover, four detachable post cards and all new drawings inside.

RIP OFF PRESS
Box 14158, San Francisco, CA 94114

Rip Off #9 should be coming out soon. At present, Gilbert Shelton is in Barcelona, devoting his time to working with new underground talents in Europe. Therefore, the next issue will feature a lot of French cartoonists; Shelton is currently working on the translations. Dave Sheridan will also be providing an original story.

It seems that even the underground characters are finding their way into other forms. For example, Diane Noonan's Deedee Glitz, who has appeared in *Arcade* and *Twisted Sisters* among others, is being included in a theater presentation called *Hot Pink*. The performers are Les Nicolettes, a women's theater group. Zippy, a character created by Noonan's husband, Bill Griffith, was used in a play by the Duck's Breath Theater Group. Last Gasp should soon be offering The Zippy Anthology for $7.95 plus $1 postage.

Inflation has forced Rip Off to begin charging $1.50 for all future *Freak Brothers* books. Work on #7 is coming along with Shelton, Mavrides and Sheridan all at work on stories. The issue's format has not been determined as yet.

Another possible project will be a compilation book featuring the art of Robert Williams, entitled *The Low Brow Art of Robert Williams*.

KITCHEN SINK
2 Swamp Road, Princeton, WI 54968

Jay Lynch's *Nard'n'Pat* #2 is due soon. The cover looks like a *Mad* spoof, with art by Pee Poplaski. Lynch has done the majority of the art but there are a few pages by Gary Whitney too. The 52 page comic sells for $1.75.

Bizarre Sex #9 will be a 44 pager by newcomer Reed Waller and it's a funny animal-and-bird story, called "Omala." The book will sell for $1.50.

Phoebe and the Pigeon People #3 by Whitney should be out by now in a large 8 x 10½" format. This one is also $1.50.

Power Pak #2 is a solo book by Aline Kominsky, who recently gave birth to a baby she conceived with Robert Crumb. It's a standard 36 page book with a $1.50 cover price.

INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS

Ex-*Star Reach* contributor Matt Howarth has a studio called Howski Studio, P.O. Box 804, Langhorne, Pa. 19047. They are producing comix and other graphic material. Ron and Russ Post, whose work has appeared in *Heavy Metal* will have an underground comic titled "Living in Harmony" due out before Christmas. Otherwise, available comix from Howski Studios are: *Retrograde* #9 by Gavin Roth 50¢; *PreHolocaust* and *Post-Holocaust* for $1 each; *Afternoon in the Sun* 50¢; *Fix* for 50¢; *Gonzo Comix* for $1 and *Rock Horror* #1 for 50¢ which are all described as comix or adult material. Include some postage.

Chauvinists that only consume American undergrounds are going to lose out by not grabbing a copy of *Knockabout Comix* #2 from England. A vast improvement over #1, it not only features a devastating S. Clay Wilson cover but terrific art and stories by D. Hine, Graham Manley, Hunt Emerson, Bryan Talbot, Bill Griffith, Clifford Harper, Paul Bignells, Gilbert Shelton and S. Clay Wilson. It's certainly a blend of some of the best Anglo-American u.g. artists and is one of the best u.g.s all year.

A new underground from the Boston area is *Screamin' Misfits* done by newcomer Bill Fitts. It's 8½" by 11"; sells for $1.25 pp, and has 12 pages of strips to it. There's a couple of obvious homages to Mr. Crumb here. It's available from Bill Fitts, 21 Park Pl., Newtonville, Ma.

A significant new publication available in 2 volumes so far is the *Real Art Letter*. It is not underground per se, but it refers to itself as the monthly newsletter of Realist Art and it's edited by Sally Harms and designed by artist Guy Colwell. There's a lot of references to the underground scene and it features spots by Boxell, Gebbie, Colwell, Trina and others. To obtain a subscription send $10 to the Real Art Letter, P.O. Box 31508; San Francisco, Ca. 94131.

Clay Geerdes continues to publish his newsletter *Comix World* and retains his regular column in the pages of *The Comic Reader*, but he also has many minis available including *Babyfat* 20-22, featuring the art of Farmer, Cruse, Oliver, Blanchard, Roldo, Taylor, Foster, Tamsula and Holman.

He also has *BFD Funnies* with work by Vojtko, Hardman, Tasula, Holman, Taylor Torville and Geerdes; *Collection of Rejections* by Miller; *Dance of Death* by Jane Oliver; *Dry Rot* by Rodin; *Stonerman* 1 and 2 by Parsonovich; *Fried Brains* #5 by Oliver, Schneider, Storner and Alder; and *Weird Paper Dolls* by Kay, Holman, Ryan and Oliver. You can get any or all of these from Clay at Box 7081, Berkeley CA 94707. ■

This is the logo for our letters column, which begins next issue. We invite readers from the professional and fan worlds to send us their thoughts on our premiere issue or about anything in the wonderful world of comics they wish to comment on. We'll be encouraging vigorous debate without getting brutal. You can send your letters to:

Lettering
COMICS SCENE
475 Park Avenue South
New York, N.Y. 10016

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Marvel Turns 20

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

Marvel Comics has been busy celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, just about ignoring its 20 years of existence prior to the publication of *Fantastic Four* #1. Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter comments that he sees this as a celebration of the *first Marvel revolution* in comics. He, president Jim Galton, publisher Stan Lee and artist Jack Kirby all took time to discuss the company's growth with COMICS SCENE

Marvel's true origins extend back to the early beginnings of comics in the late 1930s. Publisher Martin Goodman was successfully printing pulp magazines, girls' romance stories and men's slicks when Frank Toprey suggested he go into this new, highly profitable market; Toprey was the head of a studio that churned out complete comics for publishers.

Goodman liked the idea and ordered up the first issue—which was to be called *Marvel Comics*, borrowing the title from his pulp, *Marvel Stories*. The comic book premiered in November, 1939 and was a sell-out, something not too uncommon in those days. Inside that issue were characters that would keep the company in the forefront of comics publishers for a good decade. Carl Burgos' Human Torch, a flaming android, was the cover character and an instant hit. As a counterpoint to the man of fire, Bill Everett gave us the Sub-Mariner, an aquatic prince with a kingdom under the Antartic. Also introduced at the time was a comic incarnation of pulp character Ka-Zar, who, along with his saber-tooth tiger Zar, would never achieve great popularity until his revival more than 20 years later.

Goodman saw the profitibility of comics and began turning out dozens of different titles. Most featured either the Human Torch, Sub-Mariner or Captain America. Captain America was a creation of then-editor Joe Simon and frequent collaborator Jack Kirby. By then, Goodman's line was well established as Timely Comics (although the name Marvel Comics was sometimes used).

At 17, Stan Leiber joined Timely in 1939 as a writer and was soon named editor when Simon left the firm. Signing his stories Stan Lee, he became an important creative force during those growing years and gave comics unique characters, such as the Destroyer, and established that the undersea kingdom of Namor was in reality sunken Atlantis.

The patriotic and super-powered stories propelled Timely and all the other publishers through the 1940s. But by the end of the decade the Nazis and other Axis menaces had been thoroughly beaten by Timely's horde of super-heroes. They returned to the States to do battle with domestic criminals, but these adventures were too mundane compared to their wartime exploits. *Marvel Mystery Tales* (formerly *Marvel Comics)* and the Sub-Mariner's own title died in June. 1949. Captain America's title died later that year after being revamped into *Captain America's Mystery Tales.*

Timely changed with the public mood and, with Lee still at the helm, the renamed Atlas comics provided Western action, romantic heart-throbs and monster tales by the dozen. Lee and Goodman

Dr Strange

missed the public mood with a failed revival of the super-trio in 1954 but their rival DC Comics succeeded a year later with a revamped *Flash*.

A New Beginning

Lee and Goodman ignored DC's super-hero revival as Lee and company concentrated on reptitive though imaginitive monster stories. That is, until Martin Goodman noticed something. "Martin mentioned that he had noticed one of the titles published by National Comics seemed to be selling better than most," Lee recounts in his *Origins of Marvel Comics*. "It was a book called *The Justice League of America* and was composed of a team of super-heroes. Well, we didn't need a house to fall on us ... Besides, I was tired of doing those countless monster mags."

To Lee's credit, he decided against the route of direct imitation and did something very different. His four heroes were not one-dimensional people with skin-tight outfits. The leader smoked a pipe and was scholarly the girl was far from buxom and her brother was a teen-age hot head who always argued with the team s final member, a test pilot who preferred to think with his fists. Together, they made the first American manned space flight and acquired mysterious powers after passing through cosmic rays without proper shielding

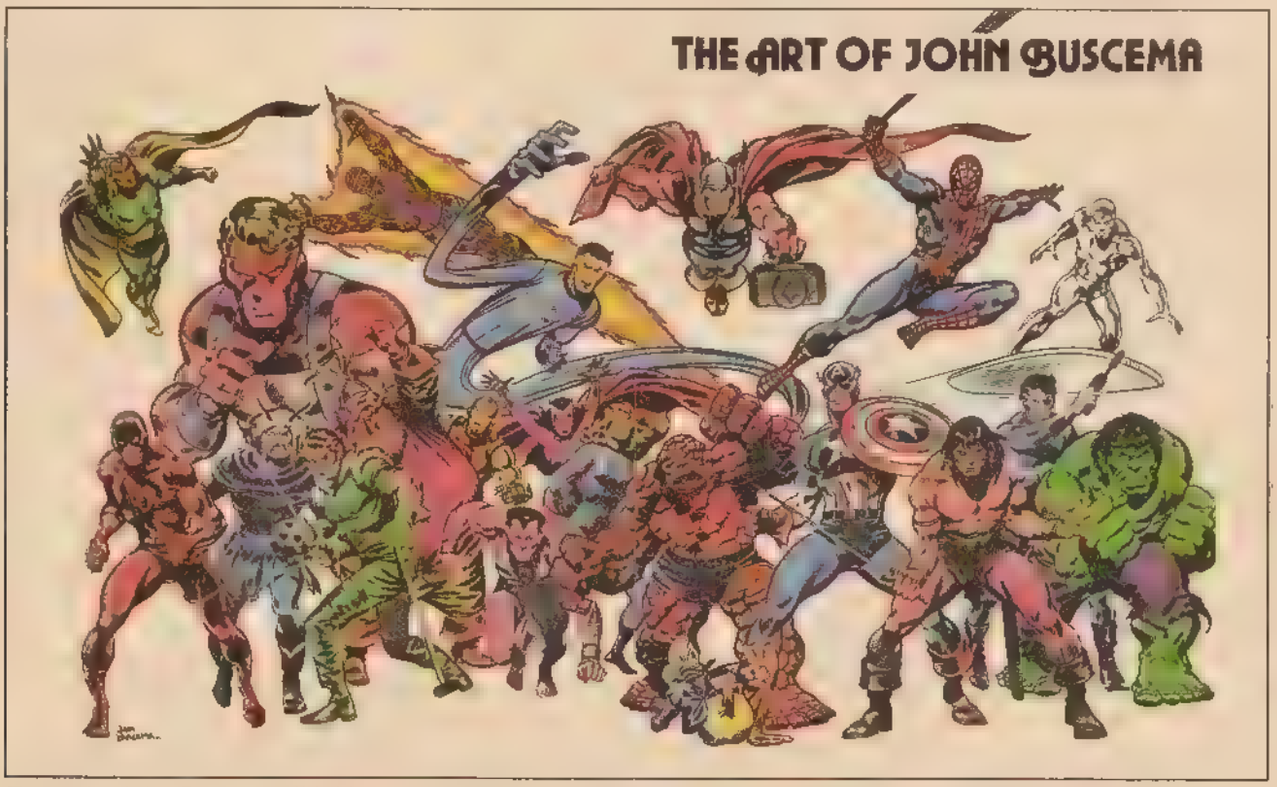
Fantastic Four premiered in late 1961 and was a hit Not only in sales but in mail response, something unheard of in the days when letter columns were extremely rare.

Sharing the credit with Lee was Jack Kirby, who had returned to Atlas/Marvel just a few years earlier. The veteran super-hero artist and innovator recalls that the first issue was tough to do. "Doing stories requires a lot of balancing and a lot of innovation, especially if you're planning to build up a line. In Marvel's case, that's what it took. When it began, Marvel was still number two and the idea was to be the leading magazine of its kind. And that takes planning and know-how. By that time, I had racked up quite a few years, created quite a few characters, so I was qualified to do it. It wasn't an overnight job," he says.

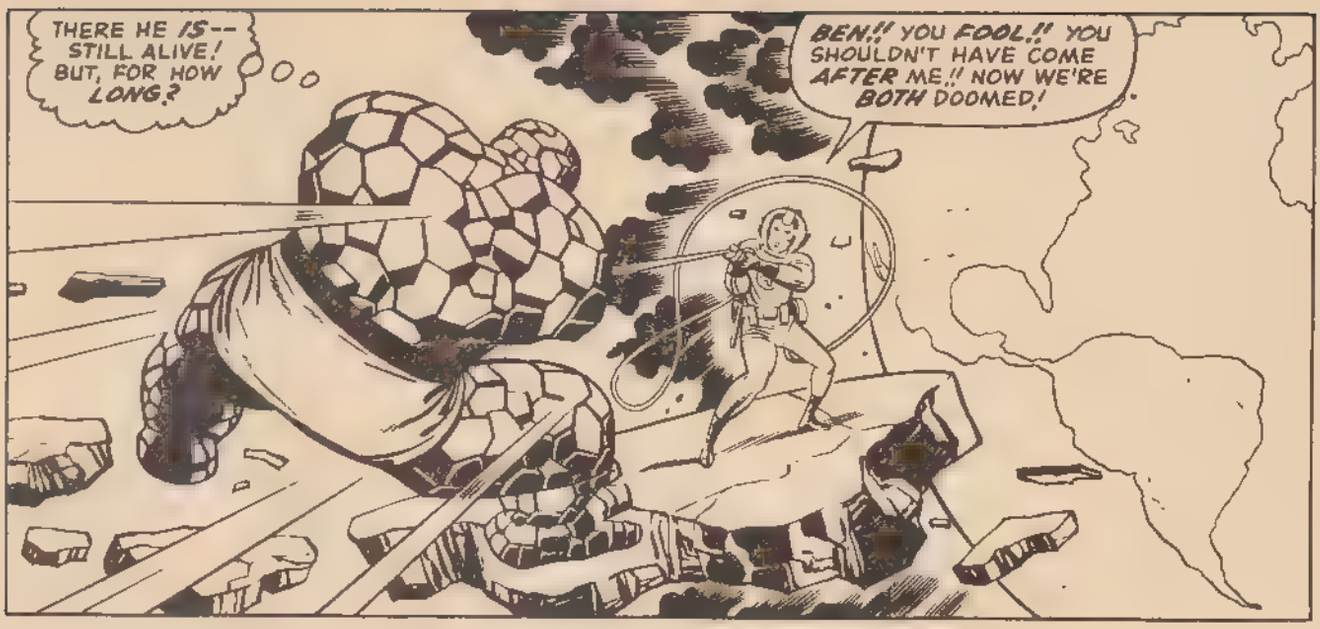
The success seemed overnight to the newly revived Marvel Comics If different super-heroes seemed to be popular, then Lee and Kirby would continue to give the public *different* heroes. May, 1962 saw the premiere of *The Incredible Hulk*, who, surprisingly enough, didn't catch on with the readers at first and died after six issues But the adrenaline was now coursing through Marvel's veins and creativity abounded. August of that year saw the introduction of Thor in the pages of *Journey into Mystery* and Spider-Man in *Amazing Fantasy* #15.

While Lee created the basics for Thor by adapting the Norse legends, he turned scripting over to his brother Larry Leiber, to relieve some of the workload. Leiber also provided the early scripts for Iron Man who premiered later that year in *Tales of Suspense* #39. Lee took the time to script the Spider-Man introduction since he wanted to do something totally off-beat and could get away with it in the last issue of a cancelled comic *(Amazing Fantasy)*. Originally, Lee says, Kirby was to have drawn the comic but his pages didn't have the right feel.

Lee turned to another talented artist who was doing fantasy and monster stories exclusively at the time: Steve Ditko. "Steve's style," Lee wrote in his book, "was almost diametrically different from Jack s. Where Jack would exaggerate, Steve would strive zealously for total realism. Where Jack made his characters as heroically handsome as possible, Steve's forte seemed to be depicting the average man in the street I decided to play a hunch. I asked Steve to draw Spider-Man. And he did. And the rest is history."



Top artist John Buscema did this successful poster for Sal Q. Productions and had a top seller on his hands.



"This Man, This Monster" is one of Shooter's favorite comic stories of all time

Lee and Kirby served up Ant Man in *Tales to Astonish* in 1962 and Ditko helped Lee create Doctor Strange in *Strange Tales* #110 July, 1963. Spider-Man was given his own title that year and by summer, two new teams were introduced, firmly establishing the Marvel style and bringing the Marvel universe into shape. The first team, *The Avengers*, was closer in style to National s *Justice League* since the book was made up of characters from other comics. On the other hand, the *X-Men*, premierng the same month, was a band of mutants training together to overcome evil mutants and human prejudice.

The company quickly grew and the comics Kirby or Ditko didn't draw, were handled by veterans like Dick Ayers and Don Heck (who helped give Iron Man his distinctive look). Kirby rapidly turned out page layouts for the others to finish.

It was Jack Kirby's dynamic, bold style that made Marvel stand out. His character designs and ideas, coupled with Lee's brand new enthusiasm, made Marvel different from any other comics published at the time. They made the heroes fight among themselves, made stories continue from issue to issue with changing supporting casts and a cross-over continuity found nowhere else. Stories came from the day's headlines; Iron Man battled the Viet Cong before many Americans knew we were fighting in Asia.

Marvel s sudden growth was noticed by the college students who found these literate heroes refreshing. The Marvel villains wanted to rule the world or command great power. The heroes had problems like homework or holding down a job. As the students found the new superheroes to their liking, the press found the students. Lee became a pop cult figure who began touring and speaking at colleges across the country. In fact, Lee is very familiar with his college readers who he claims are among the most interesting people he has met

Lee found the growth of Marvel stymied by Independant News, national distributor for both Marvel and National. With only a limited number of titles, Lee included two hero berths in a single title (such as Captain America and Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense)* and let their popularity grow. This format gave him a chance to experiment with new characters and let him introduce heroes like the Hulk (who finally found a following in *Tales to Astonish*) and Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. (who found his place in *Strange Tales*).

Lee and Marvel signed on with Curtis distributing in 1968 and were eventually bought by Cadence Industries Corp. New titles virtually exploded from Marvel that year and the heroes finally had their own titles But as the market tends to be cyclic, the Marvel super-heroes changed into super-monsters by the early 1970s. Werewolves and Dracula ruled the best-seller list for a time along with a barbarian named Conan. Marvel successfully exploited the sword and sorcery concept for a while although Conan is the only survivor today.

By the mid-1970s, Lee became President and then Publisher, allowing others to edit the comics on a day to day basis. Marvel was growing in size and Lee found a new ladder to climb. Roy Thomas, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman, Archie Goodwin and Gerry Conway all held title as editor in a short space of years. They all found the pressures too great and returned to freelance writing and editing Today, all but Goodwin are writing for DC Comics.

Spider-Man as he appeared on TV

Stan the Man Today

"I'm probably the quintessential, ultimate company man. I think it is very hard for me to separate my own feelings from those of the company," Lee says today. The former guru of Marvel Comics no longer works day to day with the company he personally built. There's too much to do in his new base of operations in Los Angeles, where Lee is busy making plans with Hollywood studios to bring the Marvel super-heroes he helped create to television and the movies.

Today, aside from the syndicated *Spider-Man* comic strip, Lee does no comic writing. "As a matter of fact," he says from his West Coast office, "I'm going to write a special edition of the *Silver Surfer* with John Byrne to keep my hand in [set to be released this month in specialty shops]. And I'd like to try and do maybe a book a year so I don't stay totally out of practice. '

Lee adds, "Actually, while I still maintain the title of publisher, and I still try to stay on top of what's being done in the magazines, I really devote the major amount of my time to the operation here on the West Coast. '

Three and a half years ago, Jim Shooter

became Marvel's seventh editor in 40 years. Besides Lee, he's held the title longer than any other. Shooter has allowed himself to become the center of attention in the fandom press and comic circles. He's taken an incredible amount of abuse and has weathered it, but not without some pain.

Shooter now presides over the publishing arm of Marvel including four magazines, paperbacks, and over 30 different monthly comic titles. During his tenure as editor-in-chief, he has experimented with the regular comics line and has totally expanded and contracted the magazine division while trying to give the entire line a corporate identity.

To the tall, serious-faced editor, Marvel's growth has been caused by changing attitudes towards the businessmen who publish comics. "For the first 20 years of the industry," Shooter observes, "basically the publishers thought it as quick money and throw stuff; no one invested any money into it. You published comics and it was not a question of if you make any money, but how much. They turned out schlock with a few gems among the garbage. Most companies have to go through a period of investment and building ... that never happened with comics. Then, with the advent of television, the decline started.

' And I think comics would have gone down the tubes had Stan not come along 20 years ago and, just on sheer creative strength alone, brought the whole field to life So we're celebrating the anniversary of the first revolution."

There were many different anniversary projects announced, all in an effort for Marvel to promote and celebrate itself.

Spider-Woman

Projects included a book by Lee recounting the origins of Marvel the company. Pans for special features in all the comics have been shelved, awaiting the silver anniversary.

Marvel released their big anniversary present in August with a dollar-sized issue of *Fantastic Four*. Along with the lead story by John Byrne, there is a Lee-Kirby story which Shooter explains: "We weren't able to get Jack to do new artwork (see sidebar) but there is artwork of his that has never been seen, namely the storyboards to the old *Fantastic Four* cartoon show. They are wonderful and we are going to run one set of those which will be scripted by Stan and inked by as many people as we can find who have inked the *FF*; George Bell for example Even some people who may never have inked the *Fantastic Four* but have had something to do with it like John Buscema.'

Shooter is also working with fan artist Fred Hembeck in assembling an *FF Roast* called, "When Titans Roast ' and will feature Hembeck's art, along with art by the likes of Don Perlin, Frank Miller and Byrne who has pencilled six pages and inked at least one. The long story involves the various Marvel heroes "roasting" the F.F. The *Roast* will be in direct sales shops next month.

Shooter believes the nation will be giving Marvel more publicity when they reach the ripe age of 25 so this year's celebration will be "mild."

Today's Problems

As the company enters its 21st year, Shooter sees Marvel struggling against the usual problems any publisher has: rising costs, maintaining and building sales, insuring the best possible distribu-

Kirby on Marvel's 20th

Jack Kirby had a major hand in the way the Marvel super-heroes looked, behaved and sold. His bold style and futuristic gadgetry has made him one of the field's true innovators. Along the way, ever since he did some work for the old Max Fleisher animation studio, he has helped create the romance comics, the youth group comics, Captain America, Manhunter, the New Gods and the Eternals, among dozens of others.

Over the years, soloing and working with talented partners like Stan Lee, Joe Simon and Wally Wood, Kirby has comfortably established a reputation in the field and is one of the most respected voices today.

COMICS SCENE spoke with him about Marvel's anniversary and Kirby's comments ran contrary to what Lee and Jim Shooter have had to say. "I think Marvel is in static hands," he says form his California home. "I think it's in the hands of people who don't know anything about the product. I think it's in the hands of people who are not going to allow them [the creators] to produce. There's no advantage for them to produce. If comics are not allowed to grow and you discourage people from creating, you're going to get a static product." Kirby's comments are mainly referring to the Marvel contract that insures that the company keeps the copyright on any new creations. It's this contract that has kept Kirby from doing any art for Marvel for two years.

"I find nothing new in them [Marvel comics]. They are more prone to give messages by people who have no messages to give. I know my work never gave messages, it was just pure entertainment," Kirby adds.

He strongly feels that writers and artists should share in any profits coming from new creations.

"Whatever is inside your head belongs to them and that's wrong," Kirby asserts. "Somehow, before, there's always been a little room for compromise somewhere but now their structure is extremely rigid and that's wrong. I think they have to be flexible on both sides. Take syndicated comics. They are a flexible deal, both parties profit by it. In legitimate publishing both parties profit. Comics are inflexible where only one party profits and the other party gets very little in return."

Kirby is watching the *Howard the Duck* law suit carefully because of its implications to the entire industry. "I would like to see some kind of precedent set because I think it would be good for everyone. Not only good for artists but also good for the firm," he says.

tion and keeping the product fresh. Specifically at Marvel, he must continue the long, slow stabilization process that will streamline the production of so many comics. After too many years of irregular creative teams playing havoc with series consistency, the carefully constructed "Marvel Universe" is in bad need of repair

Shooter's biggest step in correcting this problem has been to bring in a core of editors to edit the comics instead of expecting the one editor to properly edit the entire line. It was this expectation that drove the previous editors out of the office in such rapid succession. Each editor is now working with a handful of titles and Shooter struggles to make it a family atmosphere. The only editor who doesn't have to report to Shooter, though he does consult with him, is Archie Goodwin, editor of *Epic Illustrated*.

In fact, Shooter sees *Epic* as the answer to another problem Marvel has had to confront: dealing with creators' rights. Marvel is currently being sued for ownership by Steve Gerber, who created Howard the Duck as a supporting character in *Man-Thing*. Howard grew to be immensely popular and after Gerber left Marvel, the company went on to license the character for a radio series and a motion picture [see Comics Reporter].

DC Comics has a plan in effect that grants writers and artists 10 percent each of any money the company receives as a result of licensing characters they have created. Marvel has no such plan and Lee comments, "Honesty comes into this. I've created a number of characters for Marvel that have been successful but when I created them, I knew they were the property of the company. That was the understanding, that had always been the procedure. For me to suddenly start saying, 'Wait a minute, I own that, I'm going to sue.' To my way of thinking, that would be dishonest. I had the right to leave at any time and if I felt I was so good I could create characters and make a fortune, I had every right to do it. And I think any artist or writer who doesn't want to work for us doesn't have to sign the contract, he's perfectly welcome not to, with no hard feelings."

Under the new copyright laws, which went into effect in 1978, freelancers are performing "work-for-hire" for Marvel and the company is entitled to keep the rights to anything created under this agreement. Many professionals, including Jack Kirby, will not work for the comics under those conditions.

Lee claims that Marvel has always been working towards helping the creators financially but the closest the company has come has been *Epic*. The slick fantasy magazine allows creators to retain the copyright to their work. The only other mass market fantasy magazine that allows that practice is *Heavy Metal*. The growing alternative press market holds an attraction for disgruntled comics' professionals because more often than not, creators get to retain their copyrights.

"Everyone thinks of comics as this million-dollar industry but actually the publications don't throw off enough profit that you could give big royalties to people. There are many publications that lose money, they are just kept going because they are part of the whole thing, and you can absorb their costs and overhead. It's not as simple as 'Gee, why don't the publishers give everyone the rights to what they do?' Publishers couldn't exist if they did that right now," Lee says.

Shooter and the Fan Press

Shooter himself is also in a postion of taking a lot of heat from the fan press. Any time someone leaves the company, Shooter is made out to be the bad guy and after a few years of abuse, he seems to be getting weary of the battle.

"I think it's a little like being Darth Vader," Shooter jokes. "I have found it only makes you more interesting. I go to conventions now and the rows are filled because they all want to see the monster. I typically ask, 'How many people read the fan magazines?' and everyone's hand goes up. 'How many of you are afraid to be in the same room with me?' And all the hands go up."

Shooter takes the criticism in stride and with characteristic confidence defends every aspect of his policy towards the artists and writers. "I have fought harder for the creative people than anyone else, even Roy Thomas. It's my efforts that have gotten more money and real rewards for people. People at DC Comics are making more money because of me, because I drove our rates up.

'What I did wrong was that I did not give what they wanted to a couple of people who are a) very big names (i.e. Marv Wolfman, Roy Thomas, Gene Colan, and b) very vocal. They went to the fan press and they lost their heads. What can I do," Shooter asks. 'Can I reply, can I go back and say I'm sorry? I can't do that so they go and tell their story and all I can basically say is that's not true, that's not exactly the way it happened.

'I've heard people ask, 'If he's such a terrible person, why are Chris Claremont, John Byrne and Frank Miller still there? How can they put up with it?' I talked to Stan about this and there are people who I admire and respect who have a very low opinion of me." What may endear people to him or drive them away is Shooter's own brand of professionalism and his own struggle to tread the line between a fun-loving editor-in-chief and a corporate man. In conversation he can admit to mistakes in general but when it comes to specifics, he takes the company line and holds to it without compromise.

But in the end, Shooter has taken more flak from the press than any editor preceeding him. That comes as a result of the growing fan market and Marvel's interest in cultivating that marketplace. Shooter shrugs it off finally by saying, "Maybe nobody is wrong. Maybe it's just that we couldn't make a deal. Isn't that how things work?'

Approaches to Comics

But there have been a lot of deals that couldn't be made and the number of professionals leaving Marvel has been staggering. Many veteran professionals like Wein, Wofman, Gerry Conway and most recently Gene Colan have joined DC and they have all openly criticized current Marvel management. Meanwhile, Shooter likes to point out that a number of professionals have left DC for Marvel such as David Michelinie, Bob Layton, Denny

THERE IS NOT THE FAINTEST GLIMMER OF HESITATION IN THE MYSTIC MASTER'S EYES AS HE TURNS FROM HIS VILE HOST. DESCENDS GENTLY TO THE FLAME-SCARRED STREETS ...AND SPEAKS IN A DARK AND SOMBER VOICE...
MY FRIENDS--THERE IS NO CHOICE OPEN TO US, NO CHOICE AT ALL!
AGREED, DOCTOR
FOR THE SAKE OF MANKIND--FOR THE SAKE OF OUR OWN IMMORTAL SOULS--WE MUST MEET THE CHALLENGE--AND TRIUMPH!
SO SAY WE ALL STEPHEN.
YES MAGE--SO SAY WE--
CAFE

The Defenders have successfully changed from super-heroics to the occult.

O Neil, J.M DeMatteis and Vince Colletta

"I find that people who have gone to DC tend to be people who are at home there,' Shooter explains. ' No one has gone back and forth since I ve come here. Either they ve gone to DC, or come here. A lot of people say I m driving them away and maybe that s true but the thing is I'm attracting people too. Since I've taken charge, three and a half years ago, longer than any editor since Stan this place has taken on a personality. The industry is settling out – the DC people are now at DC and the Marvel people have come here

"Stan and I seem to be in perfect accord as to what Marvel s approach to comics is. I m making it more like it used to be, and this is attracting people who like to do it that way. I'm into fire and passion characterization and gut-wrenching stories. They're into 'How can the Flash be here when he s supposed to be there?' Not to put down their traditional approach; I worked there for many years, I think people are settling out that way, it makes sense '

Lee may not have been around to watch the day-to-day events but many people, including Thomas and Colan, turned to Lee for help when negotiations went sour with Shooter He comments "There were always people who left us and went to DC and people at DC who left and came over to Marvel I was very surprised with the Gene Colan situation, he had been with us so long and I m not even sure if I understand what that was all about These things happen occasionally and I can t say that I m always happy about them It seems to be a natural process. '

Shooter stands at the forefront of the editorial department dealing with these problems as best he can and consults with Lee whenever necessary. He ob viously enjoys what he is doing and feels glad to be a part of what he calls the second Marvel revolution. This second revolution coincides with two events. Shooter joining the Marvel staff and Lee being made Publisher, making room for a new President. "From my point of view,' Shooter says, 'It s as if we started this business five years ago. 10 or 15 years from now, Jim Galton is going to be recognized as the man who saved comics '

Jim Galton has been a book and magazine publisher for the past 25 years and was the publisher at Popular Library just before joining Marvel CBS, Popular Library s owner fired Galston and Marvel hired him The quiet, soft-spoken president says, "I really don't know how to answer that [Shooter s comment], other than to say that we've done a lot of different things and I like to think I have been a part of the innovative process. We've done an awful lot of different formats We've taken our basic format and put it into lots of different areas, we ve sold into markets we have never sold to before We've expanded the product line not only to include our own material but we have big licensees which I find important to change the pace of the Marvel line The Marvel line can become the same if we don t spice it up with other ideas. We can't have a lock on all the creative people in the world.'

This cover art from volume 9A in Pacific Comics' successful Marvel Index series shows how popular Marvel and the X-Men have become

It s interesting to note that neither Gal ton nor Lee read the full Marvel line To Lee, it's a sore point. "I miss it. I wish I had the time What I try to do is receive all the new comics and thumb through them so I have a chance to see how the books look, who s drawing what and so forth. Unfortunately, I don t have the time to thumb through all of them," he laments

Galton doesn't feel it is necessary to read them all and claims he has never read everything published by any company he has worked for. Shooter ultimately responsible to Lee and Galton, reads the comics after publication, placing total trust in his editors

Shooter explains he has taken a lesson he learned when he wrote for DC editor Mort Weisinger. He would script stories have them printed and then would receive abusive phone calls from Weisinger, tearing the stories apart for flaws. Today, Shooter lets the editors make mistakes in print so everyone can learn from the pro cess. He will take a copy of the comics and mark them up in pen and then will talk with the editors individually, explaining what was wrong

In effect, without a full time proofreader, no one person reads every comic prior to publication and only Shooter reads them all after the fact.

Observing the Line

Even though Lee and Galton don t read comics, they have this to say about the Marvel-line today: They look pretty good, Lee says happily. "I m crazy about John Byrne's work and our old regulars are still as good as ever. I m very excited about some of our new people like Frank Miller who s doing *Dardevil* and has been for the past year or so.

"I would make some observations, which I have made to Stan and Jim, ' Galton adds 'We, meaning our writers, tend to forget who our audience is. Comics were originally designed for kids under the age of 15 and when comics were in their heyday, the average age was between 10 and 12. I think we sometimes go off the market. Our writers and editors forget who it is they are writing for and I think that s bad for business.'

Galton claims the average age of a Marvel reader is 11½ despite Marvel's widely publicized popularity among college students. The president did agree that the growing direct sales market -where 33 percent of all the Marvel comics sold are purchased in stores that sell little else than comic related materials –has brought in, and retained, an older segment of the market but the comics still must be geared for an 11½ year old male reader

According to Marvel s corporate advertisements, the company reaches 77 percent of *all* children in America between the ages of six and 17. With 15,762,000 unduplicated readers, Marvel claims to reach, through pass-along, 48,389,000 monthly readers. Galton says Marvel cumulatively sells 5,000,000 comics a month with no title doing better than approximately 400 000 copies.

The numbers may sound terrific but in comparison to previous years, they are unimpressive. While Marvel may be doing better than ever, comics in general are selling millions below what they used to At its height, *Captain Marvel Adventures* sold well enough to be published twice-monthly and in 1966, *Superman* sold around 2,000,000 copies a month.

Galton joins Shooter and others in the belief that comics have suffered because of the easy accessability of television. Today the man of steel commands sales of fewer than half a million copies a

month, and Marvel's leading seller, *Spider-Man*, sells less than that.

The Black and White Dilemma

While Galton feels these comics must appeal to an 11½ year old Lee went a step beyond and created the magazine line a decade ago to go after the older, more mature reader. With the exception of *The Savage Sword of Conan* and the former *Marvel Preview*, now *Bizarre Adventures*, no black and white magazine has lasted more than two years. The magazines showed promise and at one point during the mid-1970s were among the best products Marvel was producing, but they degenerated into excuses for baring women's breasts, with stories that any 11½-year-old could have understood

Even the introduction of color to some of the magazines couldn't help poor material and, once the process got too expensive, titles like the *Hulk!* died Shooter explains the black and white magazine situtation, "When I arrived, I inherited a lot of stuff that I may not have done that way if I had created them I didn t feel like I should sweep through and do things to suit myself.

'With the black and whites, the theory was that they should be more adult than the regular comics and I found a lot of problems with what our policy then was. It went for a couple of years, not knowing what my position was on these things. Finally we had a meeting—Jim Galton Stan Lee Ed Shukin [circulation director]—and we came out with a policy and the policy is: they should be more adult in the sense of stories and avoid the soft-core porn and stuff, that are in some of the black and whites and Warren magazines We should use these magazines as a place to do more sophisticated stories rather than do R rated stories. '

Galton had another reason for shutting down the majority of the black and whites and firing their editor, Lynn Greame. ' I looked at the sales figures and they were terrible No one was buying it. The aspect was that a lot of things we were doing in the black and whites, we were doing in *Epic*, so why do it twice? All I can tell you is that sales were terrible We couldn't give the damn things away, ' he says. While the magazine line has proven a failure, it lives on in Marvel's continued series of large-format film adaptations, begun with *Star Wars* in 1977. The six-issue standard-sized comic adaptation was so popular and sold so quickly, second and third reprints were immediately ordered The tabloid-sized edition and paperback sold briskly and ever since major adaptations have appeared in multiple-format release.

Media Tie-ins

This summer alone Marvel had three major releases in several formats; adapting *For Your Eyes Only*, *Dragonslayer* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The latter will become a monthly title next year with story and art provided by John Byrne and possibly Terry Austin. Lucasfilm is granting Marvel greater freedom than Shooter originally expected

These and other media tie-ins enable Marvel to change up the line more to Galton's liking although the market has been picky. The Hanna-Barbera comic stories Marvel produced back in 1977 went nowhere and were all cancelled after a year. "I had high hopes for the Hanna Barbera material. You win some you lose some," Galton sighs

Marvel is going after that same, younger audience, with *Dennis the Menace*. The comic strip character, who recently celebrated his 30th anniversary, was too good a deal to pass up "We assessed the situation and saw good foreign sales from it and possibilities with paperbacks and maybe the animation studio, so we're going to try it,' Shooter says

Hank Ketcham, *Dennis'* creator, has been working closely with Shooter and Ketcham's studio is providing the material. The comic three issues old, is expected to be a hit not only with the younger members of the Marvel audience but with college students as well Shooter adds, 'I can see college students buying *Dennis the Menace*, I really can.

However Marvel chooses to change their line-up, a major factor that will weigh heavily will be the direct sales market People at Marvel like to think they have created the fan market, but it was already forming before *Fantastic Four* #1 appeared During the first annual Alley Awards, given by fans to the comics they loved, Marvel was ignored By the second year, they began appearing regularly

Exploiting Direct Sales

Marvel has taken many steps to help the market grow by adding former writer Mike Friedrich as a direct sales liaison It was through his efforts that Marvel received orders in excess of 400,000 for the premiere issue of *Dazzler*, a comic that would not appear on newsstands Shooter adds that Marvel is the first company to extend favorable credit terms to the comic and science fiction specialty shops that have sprung up around the country

Marvel took this a step further last month by taking three soft titles, *Moon Knight*, *Micronauts* and *Ka-Zar*, removing their ads, increasing the story pages charging 75¢ and selling them in comic shops *only*. The move was made after Galton received the recommendation from Michael Z Hobson vice-president-publishing Hobson was added to Marvel s staff in January to fill in the gap created when Lee permanently moved to the West Coast

A comic announced last year specifically for the direct sales market will finally premiere in December. *Marvel Fanfare*, printed on standard cover stock with a thicker cover for $1 25 will feature art and stories by 'fan favorites' and the most popular Marvel characters. Many inventory stories will finally see print including a three issue Black Widow feature written by Ralph Macchio and drawn by George Perez

'The trouble with the book is that we are going to be using a variety of material and a variety of artists, therefore, we have little holes in the first six issues where this guy hasn't finished the inking, this guy hasn t finished the writing and so on, ' Shooter explains. The announced line-up for those first six issues was made in August by editor Al Milgrom

'The problem with the direct sales market,' Shooter continues, "is that they're under-capitalized. These guys are mostly small operators and, while Marvel may be able to sell a much larger volume of material, they are not in a position to stock it.

'We've been trying to plan things to feed them slowly With the current tie-ins, we're trying not to give them too much in a single month They should all have gone on sale in June, but we shipped out *Raiders* in May just for that reason. So we do keep that in mind and, on the other hand we feel that we're working with them in a number of ways to help them out. We feel we can help them grow '

Shooter likes the immediate reaction and more accurate sales Customers "are a little more forgiving in that they will buy a comic for one part of it they like such as a favorite artist They will forgive bad writing to buy the work of the artist. I don t try to plan the material any differently for the direct market, I just try to realize that on the direct market they may buy a book for one facet or another.

DOMINI--IT MEANS BELONGING TO GOD ANOTHER ARCANE TOUCH. ONE WHICH PROMISES MUCH IN THE MOST UNCERTAIN AND PUZZLING FUTURE
I AM YOURS, DARK-LORD TO DO WHATEVER YOU PLEASE
I AM SURE YOU WILL, DOMINI
Marvel's best in horror *Dracula*

Experiments

Another experiment Shooter is trying, with hopes of immediate feedback from the fan market, is the mini-series. DC proved the format can work quite well and has aggressively gone ahead with several of these limited-series comics.

Marvel's mini-series, premiering in January, will be four monthly issues that will spotlight secondary characters from the Marvel Universe, in hopes of making them primary heroes. Shooter likes the fact that the mini-series can be completed to everyone's liking before scheduling the books. Starting with *Wolverine* by Chris Clarement and probably Frank Miller, the mini-series will also spotlight Hercules, the Scarlet Witch and the Vision and also the Sub-Mariner by Shooter and Alan Weiss.

"It's a way of getting attention for new characters," Shooter says. "We get a better reading from a mini-series than from publishing three issues of *Marvel Premiere* [a showcase title that recently was cancelled]."

Still yet another item Marvel is gearing for the direct sales market is the album format, so popular in Europe today. These albums will feature new and already existing characters with top names providing the story and art. Many different projects have been announced for the album series including the ever-popular *X-Men* by Claremont and Neal Adams (his first regular comics work in years), the death of Captain Marvel by Jim Starlin (delayed due to an accident) and Walt Simonson's new creation the *Star Slammers*.

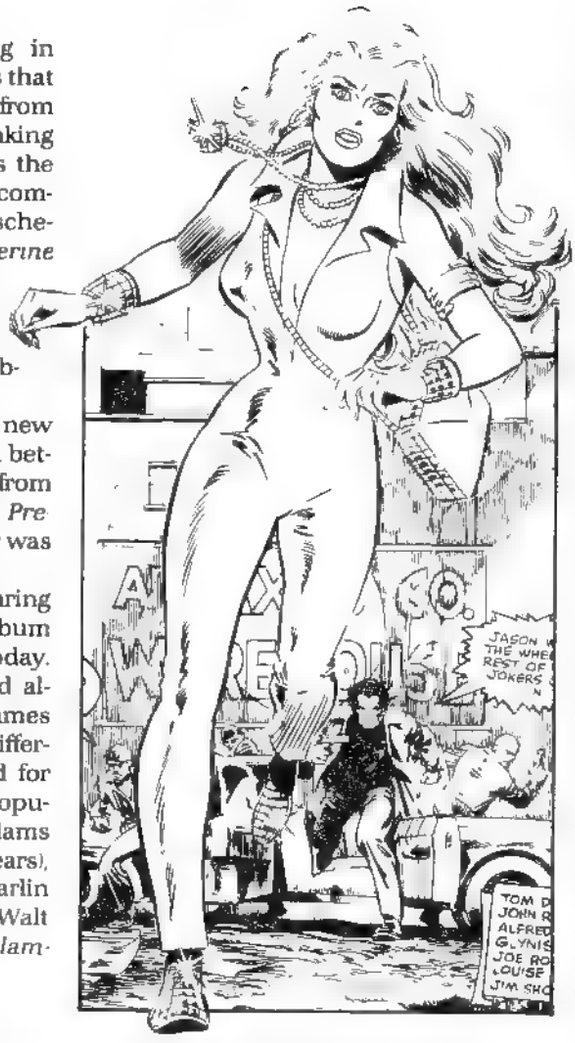
The Future Formats

With all these formats and so many different projects, heavily relying on the direct sales market, just where does Marvel see its comics going in the next few years? Rising costs have forced comic prices from 10¢ to 50¢, while story pages have shrunk.

This summer, Marvel's comics were tested when DC went to 60¢ but offered 27 pages of story while Marvel's books offer only 21. Shooter thinks the reader will choose the quality product regardless of price but also acknowledges the effects of the economy. Finally, last month, Marvel has raised its cover price to 60¢. Rather than matching DC's page count, they have upped their story pages to 22 and will introduce a second text page.

Galton leans back in his chair in his corner office and suggests that Marvel may go the album route. It'll be more expensive, but he feels it may be the best way for them to go. With the album format, Galton can forsee the comics being sold in bookstores *and* comic shops. Lee looks into the future and sees the comic shops growing more and more numerous where some form of symbiotic relationship with bodkstores may develop.

Shooter says, "At the moment, they [the comic books] are far and away the cheapest format possible; yes, they're printed on pulp paper and they're printed on letter press with plastic plates rendering some pages illegible but you can read them, follow the pictures. They have a, sort of spontaneity and charm which is nice. As long as this is the least expensive package, we'll do it."



Dazzler: A rare original success today

But just in case comic books aren't here in a few years, Marvel's other formats are being eyed carefully by both Marvel and the fans. Galton is also extremely interested in the paperback line Marvel has started. After several successful years with Pocket Books' line of Marvel reprints, the company has decided to go independant. Their first offering, a repackaging of their adaptation of *The Empire Strikes Back* sold very well, he says. This summer some of the other adaptations have appeared in paperback as well. "Some people won't pick up comics because they are subject to ridicule. It's like in the old days when guys had to hide pornography they bought," Galton laughs.

There are plans for 12 paperbacks next year, evenly split between media tie-ins and Marvel reprints. Galton can also see Marvel doing some original material for the paperbacks in the not-too-distant future.

Along with all the publishing plans, Marvel has other divisions that have sprung up over the past five years. Galton oversees a sales force that is selling the Marvel super-heroes for merchandising ranging from toy models to toilet paper. A bridge between the merchandising and the publishing line are two pop-up books Marvel recently published. Taking the idea from the highly successful Random House pop-up books featuring Superman, Wonder Woman, Popeye ,and the Lone Ranger, Marvel has released the *Hulk* and *Spider-Man*, both of which Galton claims have sold out.

Animating Marvel

The other division is the year-old Marvel Productions Ltd. that has been involved in animation only so far. Marvel bought the DePatie-Freleng studio when Fritz Freleng left, and the company has done some advertising animation and the *Pink Panther* special aired in February. Lee is in charge of the studio and is actively involved in each project they undertake as well as meeting with other studio heads in trying to get the Marvel super-heroes on television and in the movies. So far, the number of heroes optioned for projects has grown but the films have not gone into production as yet and the *Incredible Hulk* TV series was recently cancelled.

Marvel has also sold a Saturday morning series to NBC, *Spider-Man and His Amazing Friends*. The series will feature Spider-Man, Ice Man and a new heroine named Angelica Jones, a mutant (and therefore *X-Man* candidate) who can control heat. Guest stars will include Dr. Doom, the Hulk, Captain America and the Sub-Mariner.

Lee will be involved in approving plots, scripts, story boards and character designs, making sure the characters look accurate.

Galton explains the animation studio bluntly: "The intent of the animation house is to make money. The intent of the animation house is to make films and television programs using the popularity of our established characters. Despite the fact that television has taken away our readership, I think the two things can be mutually beneficial. On the other hand, if we become a totally visual society and people don't read, then we're going to be right there with them. It's something I always thought was right for the company—we should have our feet in both camps and whether or not people stop reading, there is a big market out there for programming and we should be a part of it."

"The rub-off between the comics and the studios is a good one, in that it really is the ultimate in synergy. I think that properties will go both ways between the studios and our publishing company."

The project at the animation house that has Galton the most excited, just received most of its financing when he was in Cannes. A co-production deal with Toei the Japanese production company known for Shogun Warriors (which Marvel used as the basis for a comic that failed after nearly two years), is now in effect as the two companies pool their resources to produce a full-length movie version of the classic ballet, *The Nut-*

(Continued on page 64)

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Look who's in the Movies

A report on what features are going before the cameras now and later

By STUART MATRANGA

Comics take to movies like ink takes to paper. With filmmakers realizing the enormous popularity of comic-styled stories in movies such as *Star Wars* and *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, they're beginning to look at comic strips and books as source material.

Currently there are over a dozen major films based on comic characters either released, about to be released, in production, or in pre-production.

Filming has completed on *Conan*, John Milius' (*Apocalypse Now*) version of Robert E. Howard s classic tale of the Cimmerian Barbarian. Arnold Swartzenegger, well-fitted to the role, plays the Hyborean sword-wielding, revenge-seeking Conan: ' Thief, reiver, slayer with gigantic melancholies and gigantic mirth."

Thulsa Doom, Conan's nemesis and captor, is played by James Earl Jones, the man who put the dark chill in Darth Vader's voice. Yes, Doom is really a King Kull nemesis but blame Executive Producer Dino DeLaurentiis. Max Von Sydow, also known as Ming the Merciless in *Flash Gordon*, appears as Shadizar. Also starring in the film are champion surfer Gerry Lopez as Conan's sidekick, Subotai the Mongol, and veteran dancer Sandahl Bergman as Valeria, Queen of Thieves.

The athletic prowess of Swartzenegger, (who is signed for five *Conan* epics), Lopez and Bergman is no coincidence, since they all had to perform their own stunts, including difficult climbs and jumps over Spain's rugged terrain, which served as Cimmeria in the film.

Ron Cobb (*Star Wars, ALIEN*) designed the 57 interior and exterior sets for *Conan*. Among these is Thulsa Doom s Mountain of Power and a restructured desert set up for the great battle of The Mounds. Providing an authentic look to a mythical land and time challenged Cobb. "We want the audience to believe there actually was as Hyborean Age, Cimmerians and Vanir, and a Conan, ' he says.

Writer and director Milius, who had been considering a filmic Conan for years, has tried to re-tell the Conan tale with a depth missing from the Marvel comic book. Milius hopes "to give this movie a real sense of pagan morality."

Speaking of morality, Bo and John Derek ran afoul of Edgar Rice Burroughs Inc. when they "remade" the MGM *Tarzan the Ape Man*. MGM was taken to court to prevent the film's release but after a judge indicated four minutes to be excised, the film premiered. After coming in under budget at $6 million, it grossed over $31 by Labor Day. The critics and

ART © 1981 Universal Pictures

ART © 1981 MGM

Arnold Schwarzenegger, above, as Conan in Dino DeLaurentiis' Spring film. Fans are anxiously awaiting to see how faithful an adaption it is. With luck, it won't be anything like the Derek's interpretation of Tarzan, right, a summer film that was laughed at.

fans were not amused.

Our favorite muck-encrusted mockery of a man, Dr. Alec Holland, or Swamp Thing to his cult followers, will soon see the light of movie theaters. Produced by Benjamin Melniker and Michael Uslan, and written and directed by Wes Craven (*The Hills Have Eyes, Last House on the Left*), *Swamp Thing* will remain faithful to the original DC comic created in 1972 by Len Wein, Berni Wrightson, and Joe Orlando. There have been some alterations in the story, though. Linda Holland (Nanette Brown) is now the sister instead of the wife, of Alec Holland (Ray Wise,. Lt. Cable, the government agent assigned to protect the Hollands as they work on their bio-restorative research in the middle of a swamp, and who later hounded Swamp Thing in the comics has switched sexes in order to accomodate the considerable requirements of Adrienne Barbeau.

Louis Jourdan, better known for sipping domestic sparkling water, than stalking swamps, plays the despicably evil Arcane, a man dedicated to world domination.

The filming has recently wrapped up amid the swamps and plantations of Charleston, South Carolina. *Swamp Thing* should be lurking in a theater near you, courtesy of Avco Embassy in early 1982.

On a lighter note, legendary John Huston and crew have been trampling through New Jersey filming *Annie*. Though a musical-comedy in its Broadway form and a sentimental melodrama as a comic strip, the film incarnation of Little Orphan Annie promises to be more than simple caricatures put to music. Columbia is following this conviction with a publicity-push that can't be beat.

"It's the story of a little girl,' says producer Ray Stark, ' an orphan who dreams, and then lives, the impossible dream. And of Daddy Warbucks, who is shown by Annie that there are other things in life besides money and power. *Annie* is the story of the love that grows between these two unlikely people.'

Albert Finney (*Wolfen, Looker*) tackles the formidable Warbucks character, while 9-year-old Aileen Quinn romps through the movie as Annie. Also in the cast, as a trio of ruthless villains, are Carol Burnett, Bernadette Peters and Tim Curry.

'Though omitted from the play, Punjab, played by the multi-talented Geoffrey Holder, returns to the story as Warbucks' mystical man-servant. And, after an exhaustive search, a 5-year-old Otterhound named Bingo will appear as Sandy. *Annie* will premiere, amid countless hoopla in April, 1982.

While *Superman II* looks like it might out-super *Superman* at the box office, *Superman III* is beginning to gleam in the eyes of David and Leslie Newman, who have been contracted to write the third part in the continuing adventures of the man of steel, Lois Lane, and company. The Newmans helped resurrect the original *Superman*, and wrote the first sequel as well. Richard Lester will definately direct *III* and the same cast will return. However, the script will have to wait until David and Leslie finish their solo work on *Sheena, Queen of the Jungle* and *The Shadow*, respectively.

The tone will be different than *Superman*," David Newman said recently to COMICS SCENE of ' his half-completed screenplay for *Sheena*. "The Sheena character never had the resonance of Superman. What it comes down to is boobs in a lioncloth. She's basically a Tarzan rip-off.' But, Newman has re-developed the character. His story, set in modern Africa "with all the problems of emerging nations involved" concerns an "Eve in the Garden, or Prospero's daughter, surrounded by nature, yet in harmony with it."

There is also a new love interest, "a character like Mike Wallace, a hot-shot journalist covering the African nation story who hears about this mysterious white goddess in the jungle.

'There were many problems to get over in the story. There is the sexist problem and a racial problem involved with a white goddess amid African savages with bones in their hair. We want to take out all the unpleasant connotations and still preserve the essense of Sheena's story." Sheena enjoyed immense popularity as a comic book heroine in the 1950s.

Meanwhile, in a seperate office, Newman's partner and wife, Leslie Newman, has been busily banging away at a new rendition of Leisure Concepts' classic detective, *The Shadow*. Stan Weston of Leisure Concepts is also haggling with Hollywood over two other action heroes, *The Green Hornet* and *Doc Savage*. But there seems to be a lot of excitement right now over *The Shadow* which Martin Bergman (*Four Seasons*) is producing for Universal.

' After they approached me I agreed to write the script on the condition that it

ART © 1981 AFD/Universa

Another poor adaptation was May's *The Legend of the Lone Ranger* above, squelching any sequels. Producer Mike Uslan sees his *Swamp Thing* film, right, as a great training ground for his next feature, a *Batman* movie soon to go into production.

ART © 1981 Columbia Pictures

ART © 1981 DC Comics Inc.

This summer's big sequel hit was *Superman II*, above, opening the door for a third film to begin production next year. About that time, Columbia's *Annie*, top, will premiere amidst lots of corporate hoopla and publicity. Considering it's John Huston and a cast of thousands, it can't miss.

would be done straight and in period,' said Leslie. "I then asked them if I could name the period." They agreed, and as a result Leslie will intergrate the pulp and radio versions of *The Shadow* and will set the first of possibly several movies during and after World War I.

"That age had lost its certainty. There was a sense that life was no longer certain after the war. Lamont Cranston was supposed to have been an ace spy and pilot during the war and afterwards he went through a total immersion course in oriental mysticism."

Leslie had for a long time been interested in that "quality of magic and mystery in the story." That's why she insisted on resisting the easy temptation to "camp up' the story. Initially, however, she had her doubts "My first impulse was give me a break—secret passageways, poisonous rings!?' But then she realized that "it's a great chance to do the kind of film I always loved as a child."

Though naturally reluctant to reveal any of the suspenseful plot or the mysterious details of Lamont Cranston's shadowy alter ego, Leslie did admit that "we have a wonderful arch-villain and a wonderful red herring. I can tell you that we have the ultimate car chase in an early 1920's Rolls Royce driven by the Shadow.

"And of course there will be a spunky Margo Lane" as the Shadow's aide, added Leslie. "I always seem to get involved with women named Lane." Though if you believe Phillip Jose Farmer or DC's E. Nelson Bridwell, the two are related.

There's good news and bad news along the grapevine. First, though he'd be perfect for the role, it looks like John Belushi will not star in *Alley Oop*, the long-delayed Columbia project. According to sources, Belushi is trying to break out of his "crazy animal" image. Columbia is still committed however, to the story of the pre-historic Oop who discovers a time machine and has adventures across a limitless spectrum of history and myth. And, contrary to rumors, Blondie's Deborah Harry is a long way from agreeing to portray red-headed *Brenda Starr* in producers' Irwin Meyer and Stephen Friedman's $12,000,000 movie. The poor track performance of the highly-touted *Lone Ranger* movie ruled out any possibilities of a sequel. Klinton Sillsbury's lines as the masked man had to be redubbed by James Keach.

Universal, still hot on *Flash Gordon*'s respectable success, is considering plans for a sequel. No details are available yet.

Hopefully things will go well for *Swamp Thing* because producer Mike Uslan has another project in the works—*Batman*, and as inspiration he'll refer to the early 1970's Denny O'Neil, Neal Adams version and the 1979 Steve Englehart, Marshall Rogers stories, as well as several less recent periods during Batman's 41 year crime fighting career. The writers' strike has delayed the screenplay but Uslan still expects production to begin by the end of the year and PolyGram expects to release *Batman* through Warner Brothers in the fall of 1982.

Gold Crest films has recently announced plans for a multi-million dollar production featuring King Features perrenial magician, *Mandrake*. Along with Lothar, the pair will make their film debut in a more lavish incarnation than their NBC television appearance of a few years back.

And speaking of television, with the *Incredible Hulk* finished, and *Buck Rogers* mercifully laid to rest, the only superhero left is the *Greatest American Hero*. The Stephen Cannell produced series will be back for a full season once Hollywood gets back into high gear.

A while back, Universal held the options for several Marvel super-heroes but only the *Hulk* made it. The problem, according to Stan Lee is that the studio changed the characters' basic appeal and the fans didn't recognize their heroes.

Lee says that there are several Marvel heroes contracted for movie development but none have gone anywhere. The biggest production may be the *Silver Surfer* movie but that's still in preproduction along with the screen version of *Howard the Duck* which Lee expected to be first. Other heroes currently optioned include *Thor, X-Men, Fantastic Four, Daredevil* and *Ghost Rider* (though one wonders what De Laurentiis will do with this concept).

Finally, as we went to press, John Landis (*An American Werewolf in London*) confirmed for us that he will indeed write and direct a *Dick Tracy* movie in 1982. "There'll be no wrist-radios or Moon Maidens in this one," he said. ■

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Fandom

The Phenomenon: 1965-1981

By ADAM MALIN

Science fiction and fantasy have long encouraged a following of enthusiastic fans. With the growth of electronic, visual and printed media this network of genre afficionados formed a constantly evolving subculture of people called 'fandom.

The convention has always been a place where similarly interested parties can meet to exchange views and share their enjoyment of their particular interest. It's not hard to see why it became the focal point for the development of the sci-fi-fantasy fandom. Originally, the World Con was the only such animal, and basically catered to the needs of the sci-fi audience. As comic books (a successful medium for sci-fi-fantasy) became more popular, a New York based SCARP Con introduced the comic book fans into the fandom-convention structure.

It was logical that the next step in conventions was a greater structure that would accomodate the growing number of different interests in fandom. Science fiction/fantasy films had always been one of our shared interests, and over the decade 1970-1980 that industry would see an enormous expansion. To accommodate all the different types of interests shared by fandom, multimedia conventions came into being, such as Creation Conventions, founded in 1971 by myself and partner Gary Berman. Here the sci fi film fans and comic book fans finally have a chance to share a matrix of similar interests.

One of the most outstanding things about fandom is that it actually helps mold the professional world it idolizes. Conventions are an interface where professionals meet the fans and fans have an opportunity to help mold the way the pros think. These conventions also bring potential professional talent under the eyes of attending professionals. In this way, fan blood makes its way into the pro market, further enhancing the way the film, book and comic book makers think. The result is an ever-evolving and growing professional market catering to an increasingly diverse and sophisticated fan.

Nowhere is the fan-pro interaction at conventions more evident than in the geometrical increase of science fiction and fantasy films. Over the last decade they have become the most successful form of cinema to date! Incredible amounts of money have come into the hands of people who were fans themselves—the Lucases and the Spielbergs. What we have now is a decade that promises to use that money to give fandom films beyond imagination.

Successful sci-fi and fantasy films cause a proliferation of others. At our recent Los Angeles show, Columbia Pictures brought in 29 people to market survey the crowd. Fan market promotion by the film companies is a growing reality with companies like Con Artists of L.A. attending the growing number of conventions. The film industry has finally taken notice of us.

Adam Malin is co-chairman of Creation Conventions and former editor of *Infinity*.

The burst of fandom has one major focal point in the great American comic book. This supposedly throwaway medium has built up tremendous collectable value. Comic fans were amongst the first to organize at conventions. Not surprising, since comic books have always catered to our love of fantasy and sci-fi. What was fascinating to watch was that the generation of fans who attended these comic conventions became the next generation of comic professionals. Heavies of today like John Byrne, Dave Cockrum, Frank Miller, etc. were all fans who attended conventions!

Further complicating this cross-fertilization was that as comic books and their characters got financially huge, the film companies (opportunists from the start) finally noticed. After decades of practically ignoring us, the day came when they had to admit we are their biggest market. Comic book characters started coming to life on the screen, both in the theaters and on TV. Television picked up the cue earlier, in the sixties, with shows like *Outer Limits*, *The Prisoner*, *Lost In Space*, and *Star Trek*. All drew extensively from a wealth of science fiction and fantasy concepts taken from books and comic books. *Batman* was the ultimate well done putdown of the genre, but fandom intended for itself to be taken seriously.

The film *2001* opened a lot of doors for sci-fi fandom and the genre's future in films. Following soon after were the *Apes* films, *THX 1138*, and with the coming of the 1970s, a multitude of others. But it wasn't really until a little film named *Star Wars* that the potential value of the convention to the film companies became obvious. Lucas, in his own fan wisdom, budgeted a good deal of publicity money on promotions of the film for fan conventions across the country. We presented previews of both *Star Wars* and *Empire*, courtesy of George Lucas. His far sightedness paid off with a record breaking success followed by even greater bounty for *Empire*. All the film companies watched with envy, and decided they too would follow in his footsteps. The rest is history. Example—at our recent San Francisco show, we previewed slides, 16mm films, and video tapes for *Superman II*, *Heavy Metal*, *Dragonslayer*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Wolfen*, *Maniac*, and *The Burning*. These films, costing hundreds of millions of dollars and representing the likes of Columbia Pictures, Warner Communications, Filmways Pictures, Paramount Pictures, and Lucasfilms, readily attest to the victory fandom has won in getting what it wants to see on the screen once and for all—gratifying.

The evolution of Marvel Comics is embedded in the fabric of fandom and conventions. When Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were making their excellent comics of the 1960s, fandom still basically watched from afar. But with the seventies and the proliferation of fan conventions things changed. Fans of the 1960s were becoming the professionals of the 1970s and their ties were to fandom and the conventions. Thus, the comics of the 1970s were more interactive with their audience. After all, the artists, writers and editors faced a barrage of fans at every show they would attend, and the fans' talk increasingly influenced professional thought, particularly since these pros were fans who had been to conventions themselves.

Here are some examples of interactive relationships between the forces of fandom and the professional comic book, book and filmmakers who both attend conventions. At the recent Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco Creation Conventions, Frank Marshall, the producer of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, personally gave the preview presentation of *Raiders* slides and 16 mm films. He personally answered questions and pursued suggestions for future exploits of Indiana Jones, since Indy will certainly be back for some future *Raiders* film, as Frank said, "It might be called *Raiders of the Lost Washtub* or something!"). It was a pleasure and privilege to have the talented Mr. Marshall devote so much personal energy and care to his convention appearances, and another victory for fandom.

Then there's the case of the on-stage plotting sessions. At shows throughout the country, particularly San Diego and Creation, artists and writers of comic books take to the stage to grapple with the audience. Their mission is to create new antagonists, concepts and plots for upcoming comic books. These type of group-think sessions, now seen quite often, represent the type of interaction that can develop between the fan and pro communities at conventions. This interface is helping the fan population get what they want from the professional filmmakers, comic book creators, writers and artists. Also, the professional contingent picks up new rank and file from the fans themselves. This interaction is fantastic and a pleasure to watch. There's

Dealers supplement their comics with books, records, posters and even food

Attendence isn't a problem at the major cons around the country, is it?

nothing quite like seeing fans work their art or filmmaking technique up to a professional level over the years (much akin to a musician's slow road to maturity).

People like Tom Savini, a stunt man with deep fan roots, secretly longed to act but also loved makeup and prosthetic effects for films. His alliance with George Romero for *Dawn of the Dead* (previewed by Romero himself at a *Creation* in N.Y. some time ago) made his name a household word in fan circles. Then came *Maniac*, and finally in *Knightriders* he had a considerable chance to act as well as create special effects. Now he is going into directing—a multi-talented guy. Then there's Howard Chaykin, who used to struggle from convention to studio trying to get work for his developing talent. Today Chaykin is a premiere artist whose work has been seen literally by millions of people—another fan turned pro.

Perhaps fandom is comprised of people who long to be the professionals they so admire! If so, then the convention has been a unique meeting place and breeding ground as well as communications tool in both directions between an adoring fan public and the professionals.

The Future of Media and its Impact on Fandom

In the last 20 years there have been some outstanding advances in the technologies of filmmaking and video, as well as the computer's increasing impact on our society. Today's professional as well as fan has access to these new technologies, such as videocassette. The result is a fan unlike those of 20 years ago. Today's fan is more diverse and sophisticated. Space age technology has put all the great films at his/her fingertips. Any rare old comic book can now be had, for a price. Likewise the pulp and sci-fi books. The market for new films, comics, magazines and other media has become cluttered and because the buying public (i.e., fan) has grown more sophisticated, the professionals work harder than ever to keep their place in the market. In general it is a great time for all afficionados of science fiction and fantasy, for the coming of new age tech has greatly enhanced our ability to enjoy ourselves with our arts!

Some incredible things lie ahead in the future, thanks to this trend. In filmmaking, future SPFX oriented films will have stronger characterizations and plots (hopefully). But think of the actual effects. Just seeing *Raiders* and *Dragonslayer* should convince anyone that the best effects work is still to come! Special effects studios are new multimillion dollar technological laboratories. There is Roger Corman's New World facility in Venice, California; Industrial Light and Magic, George Lucas' company in northern California; John Dykstra's new facility; Douglas Trumbull's new facility (he claims will be the biggest and most complete); and a host of others. Technology has some very positive benefits for our entertainment.

How do you think the science fiction writers are coping with future shock? Now that we are on the verge of colonization of at least this solar system, our very reality is pretty fantastic. Probably, the sci-fi writers will just have to climb higher still!

What about comic books? Or rather, graphic story magazines, because this will be the decade when the graphic story novel really comes into its own. Marvel Comics has its *Epic* Magazine, there has been *Heavy Metal* for a few years, graphic story novels by Chaykin, Walter Simonson and others have reached *The New York Times* best seller list. Adults take their comics seriously, and are building a market for increasingly sophisticated graphic story products. Not surprisingly, the fan population has itself evolved several high quality forms of its own, so that the graphic story form has seen a large market within the direct fan market alone.

Magazines like Mike Freidrich's *Star-Reach*, Dean Mullaney's *Eclipse* and others are built on the increasingly sophisticated tastes of the graphic story reading public, yet sell mainly to a fan market. In general, quality is increasing. Even the printing quality of good magazines has gotten better with technology. Still, an esoteric and beautiful product like Kenneth Smith's *Phantasmagoria* may still not make it despite its quality, for with the technological burst and the expansion of the competition within a market, even the best may not make it with the odds against them.

And what of television itself? How will it affect sci fi and fantasy fans? Already we are watching movies via videocassette or cable networks. It seems the day of the great three networks is coming to a close. Certainly they never really cared about the emotional attachment we, the viewing public had for sci-fi/fantasy, or much of the TV drivel of the last 20 years would not have been created. The occasional series that was good got the positive qualities from its producer and actors and production people, not the networks—they only cared about ratings. But with cable and viceocassettes, fans have greater flexibility to choose quality programming once and for all! And people like Fred Silverman lose their jobs.

Other forms of media entertainment are coming. The six-foot home video screen systems are continually being refined, as is the laser disc system. Other advances include digital recording, which promises to bring undreamed of fidelity to audio and visual recordings. Basically, digital systems utilize a computer logic and memory to record and play back their data. Computer sound synthesis is already a reality, as is computer graphics. The computer is yet another tool that today's artist may utilize in his quest to appease our insatiable need for entertainment.

In conclusion, comic/sci-fi/fantasy fandom has evolved with our society, and the evolution is a healthy one. The premise is for greater entertainment for tomorrow, to meet the needs of an increasingly sophisticated viewer. Conventions have helped to mold and accelerate the changes fans have been going through. Technology increases and brings new ways for fans to express and enjoy themselves. If anything, tomorrow's fandom will be an incredible group of media afficionados well versed in the different arts at earlier ages. It's a big kick to sit back and watch it all grow. ■

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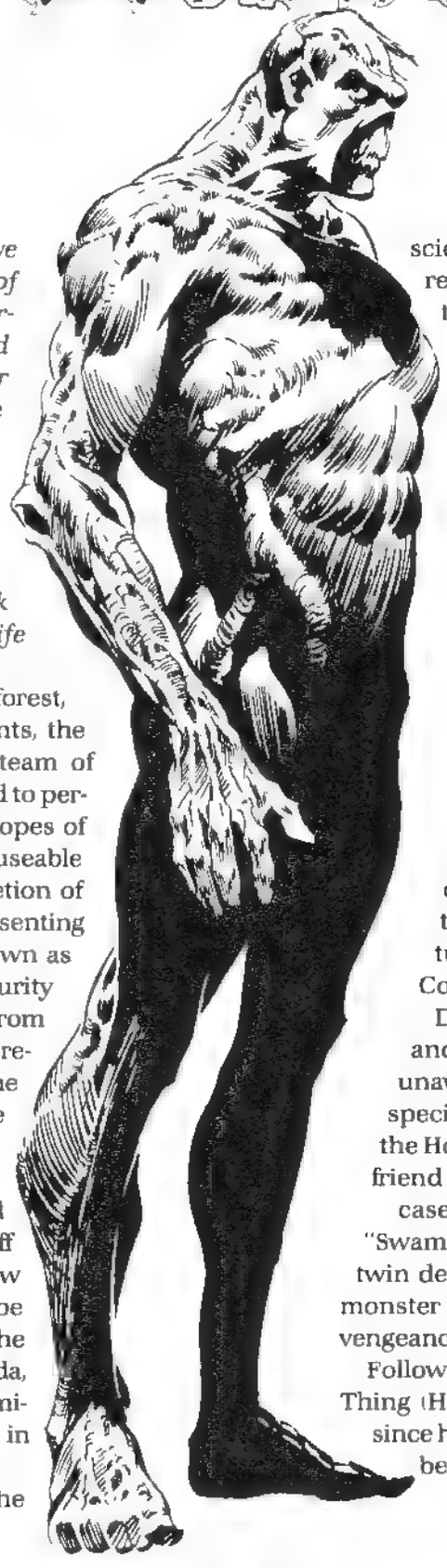

Editor's Note: Beginning this issue, we will occasionally present profiles of comic book characters to help familiarize fans who may not have been exposed to these long-running creations. Our first profile is of Swamp Thing since he will be bursting forth into the public eye once again this spring when his movie is released by Avco Embassy, followed by DC Comics' new comic series, written by Martin Pasko and drawn by Tom Yeates. Here now, a look at Swamp Thing and the people in his life

Tucked quietly away in a dense forest, protected by government agents, the husband and wife research team of Alec and Linda Holland worked to perfect a bio-restorative formula, in the hopes of turning barren deserts into lush and useable farmland. As scientists neared completion of their testing a man named Ferrett, representing a secret underworld organization known as the Conclave, got past the lab's security system and offered to buy the formula from the Hollands. The strong-willed Alec refused, wishing to use the formula for the betterment of the land and not the greed of the criminal Conclave.

Late one night, unbeknownst to the Hollands, Ferrett and his aides planted a bomb in the laboratory set to go off while the Hollands are inside to show people that the Conclave was not to be denied what they wished. On cue, the bomb exploded, instantly killing Linda, Alec, now covered with burning chemicals, raced into nearby swamp waters in an effort to douse the flames.

Hours or perhaps even days later, the scientist had no way of knowing, Holland regained consciousness and discovered that the bio-restorative formula and the swamp waters had interacted, seeping into his open wounds and turning the tall, blond, blue-eyed Alec Holland into something between man and plant. He was no longer human, but was instead a shambling, grotesque mockery of a man.

In exchange for his humanity, Holland gained incredible strength and endurance, the ability to regenerate any severed limb, and increased size and weight. Speech was now a painful procedure since his vocal chords had changed drastically, and if he didn't move around frequently, he found himself starting to take root.

Alone, mourning not only his wife's death but his own hideous transformation, Holland went about a slow, torturous route to find and finish off the Conclave.

During his journeys throughout Europe and America, Holland had been totally unaware that the government had assigned special investigator, Matt Cable to observe the Hollands. Cable, who was also a personal friend of the Hollands, threw himself into the case and discovered that sightings of a "Swamp Thing was somehow tied in with the twin deaths. Cable wrongly deduced that the monster caused the deaths and began seeking vengeance.

Followed closely by the investigator, Swamp Thing (Holland's own choice for a new name since he no longer considered himself human) became involved with a scientist named Arcane who built his own forms of life:

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AMAZING...! MY ARM IS REFORMING... EVEN AS I WATCH...!
MATTHEW SOMEONE IS COMING
AND FROM HIS ATTIRE, I'D SAY HE'S NOT INTERESTED IN SUN-BATHING
OH NO. I RECOGNIZE THE EXPRESSION ON THAT FACE
I KNEW
VACATION
NEEDED
HATES ME

Swamp Thing is ever the loner, left, while Cable willingly accepts Abigail Arcane's help, right

un-men, Arcane found Swamp Thing an interesting study but also wanted his power. Holland would have none of it and, in a fight with Arcane, sent the evil scientist tumbling off the top of a tower, supposedly to his death. It was later learned that Arcane survived the fall, barely. His loyal un-men rebuilt him—although he didn't quite turn out human-looking—he became as misshapen as Swamp Thing.

Arcane's daughter, Abigail, became involved with Cable as a result of the clash and the two fell in love. She proved herself quite capable and resourceful, aiding Cable on his future assignments. Abby also provided a secondary conscience for Cable, reminding him that every time they met up with Swamp Thing, the creature acted uncharacteristically—as far as monsters went.

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Swamp Thing saved Cable's life repeatedly. One time in Gotham City, Cable was tortured by the Conclave and Swamp Thing found himself face to face with Nathan Ellery, successful businessman by day and lord of the Conclave by night. Not only did Swamp Thing rescue Cable but he put an end to the Conclave for good. During this particular adventure, Swamp Thing came into contact with Batman, who was searching for a monster prowling the streets of Gotham. Both Cable and Batman learned that there was much more to Swamp Thing than met the eye.

Swamp Thing also learned things about himself. When he finally confronted Ellery, he began beating the obese criminal mercilessly, letting himself act as primordially as the swamp waters that helped save his life. His humanity then resurfaced in time to spare Ellery's life. He refused to bring himself down to Ellery's level, choosing instead to remain true to the humanitarian spirit of his previous life as Alec Holland.

During his travels, Swamp Thing met up with many oddities in life, and with each, shared some form of kinship since they all were considered outcasts of society. He encountered things he always considered part of fantasy: witches, werewolves, patchwork composites of humans and zombie-like people. And not everyone he encountered was an outcast with a good soul—there were plenty of twisted people, including the patchwork man, mutated worms, assorted monsters and just plain evil, prejudiced humans.

In addition to the bizarre creatures found on Earth, Swamp Thing also had his share of extra terrestrial encounters. Among the many races of alien species that crossed his path, Swamp Thing met the world's most popular alien: Superman.

Swamp Thing's most recent encounter paired him again with Batman as the two tried to solve a woman's mysterious death. The riddle was eventually cleared up with a little help from beyond the grave. As he shambled off into the Mississippi regions, Alec Holland considered his plight in life and wondered what was to become of him. Would he ever gain some self respect? Without that, he thought, there would be no hope of restoring himself to normalcy. ■

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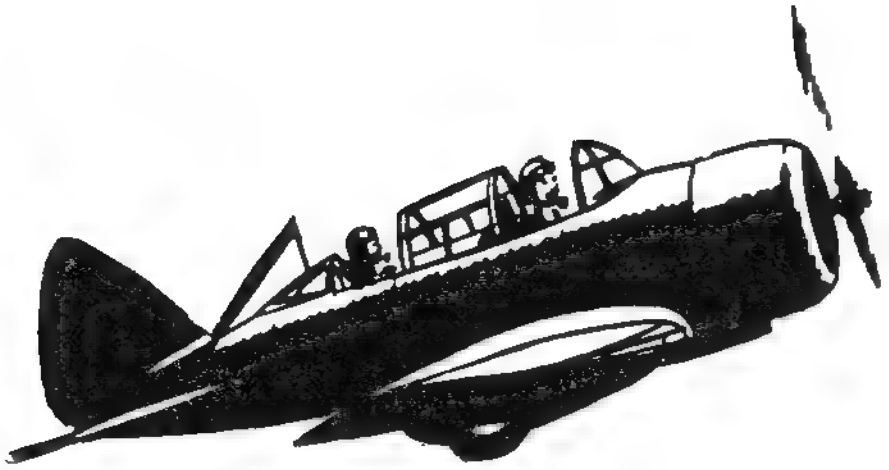


Scorchy Smith

A look at one of the great adventure strips from an era that is fading away

By RON GOULART

Adventure strips, once a staple of any well-balanced newspaper comics page, have been gradually fading away. Many have already passed on, others are breathing their last. With the exception of comic book, movie and television spinoffs, there has been no successful new straight continuity strip launched in nearly 20 years.

Scorchy Smith began in the spring of 1930, one of the initial batch of low budget strips offered by the Associated Press. This was in the days before the airplane was taken for granted as just another means of transportation, even before most of the world had heard much of fighter planes and bombers. Back a half century ago there was an enormous interest, triggered in good part by the exploits of daredevil flyers like Charles A. Lindbergh in aviation. People were eager to follow the topic in newspapers and magazines and also in all the entertainment media. There were therefore, aviation movies, aviation novels, aviation plays, aviation pulp magazines and a whole squadron of aviation comic strips.

Noel Sickles on Scorchy Smith:

"The reason for deciding on that style was to make the strip more real. I wanted to bring it out on the page."

ER - GOOD MORNING. COULD YOU TELL ME WHERE THE FIELD MANAGER IS — ?
TYING HIS NECKTIE, PERHAPS -
- OR POWDERING HIS DEAR LITTLE NOSEY-WOSEY.
BUSTER KEATON

SCORCHY SMITH
Hop, Skip And Bump!
MADDOX TRIES EVERY TRICK HE KNOWS TO SHAKE SCORCHY, BUT THE BIG RED PLANE KEEPS FORCING HIM DOWN, DOWN UNTIL BOTH SHIPS ARE PERILOUSLY NEAR THE EARTH ...
MIGHT AS WELL TAKE YOUR MEDICINE, MADDOX — I'VE GOT YOU — AND YOU KNOW IT !!
PANCAKE YOU HEDGE HOPPER ! YOU'RE THROUGH !!
ONE FINAL DIVE AND SCORCHY NOSES HIS RIVAL'S PLANE TOWARD A LINE OF HIGH TENSION WIRES!
SCORCHY PULLS OUT OF HIS DIVE JUST IN TIME, BUT THE OTHER SHIP CRASHES INTO ONE OF THE POLES AND CAREENS INTO THE FIELD BEYOND ... !!
3-27

The decade or so following Lindbergh's world shaking solo flight across the Atlantic in 1927 saw the advent of *Tailspin Tommy, Skyroads, Flying To Fame, Scorchy Smith, Smilin' Jack, Barney Baxter* and *Flyin' Jenny*

Scorchy Smith was a lanky lad very much in the Lindbergh mold, a barnstorming young pilot whose life was caught up in the romance of flying. During his career, which lasted three decades, Scorchy did just about everything a freelance flyer could do. He was involved in South American revolutions, joined a volunteer group to fly for the Chinese against the Japanese invaders, served as a fighter pilot in World War II, even involved himself in the space program. Because the Associated Press was not generous with its artists, there was quite a turnover and Scorchy's adventures were rendered by a variety of artists. AP's tight-fisted salary policy also caused them to lose the services of Al Capp and Milton Caniff. Some of the Scorchy artists were hopeless second raters, but at least three were among the best men ever to work on adventure strips. And one of them revolutionized the whole field. We'll be concentrating on the heyday of *Scorchy Smith* and on the three aces who kept him flying.

The strip was created by John Terry, the brother of animator Paul Terry and himself a former animator and political cartoonist. Despite the clumsy and inept quality of the strip as done by the largely ungifted Terry, it attracted readers and client papers. By the end of 1933, when tuberculosis forced Terry away from the drawing board, *Scorchy Smith* was AP's bestselling strip. Not wishing to tamper with it, feature editor Wilson Hicks looked around the art department for somebody to ghost the strip until Terry recuperated. He picked Noel Sickles, then in his middle 20s, who was doing political cartoons and general art in the AP bullpen. At the time he accepted the assignment Sickles, who'd gotten his AP berth through his longtime friend Milton Caniff, didn't have a very high opinion of the hero he'd been handed or of John Terry's work. "It was the worst drawing I had ever seen by anybody," he once told me.

Gritting his teeth, the young Sickles imitated his predecessor as best he could and signed John Terry to the strips. The very first one ran in some 200 papers across the country on Monday, December 4, 1933. Actually it wasn't a very good job of ghosting, since Sickles was so much better an artist that even his attempted impersonation was a vast improvement. When he took on the six dailies a week, his salary remained what it had been in the bullpen, $42.50 per week. Terry was never able to come back to the feature and on his death in 1934, Sickles was allowed to sign his own name, but cautioned not to change the overall look of the strip too swiftly. "Within that second six months," Sickles has said, 'I had to decide how I wanted to do it.' His decision turned the newspaper strip field upside down.

What Sickles began to develop on *Scorchy Smith* was the impressionistic, lushly black style which his friend Caniff later adapted for *Terry And The Pirates*. By the early 1940s, the impact of the style

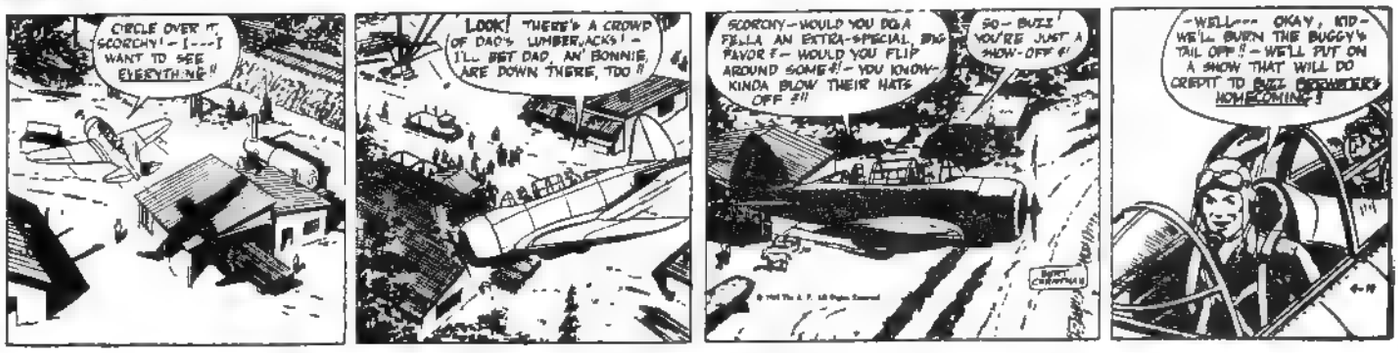
Ron Goulart on Frank Robbins:

"He arrived at his highly individual impressionist style by his own route, guided more by his own sensibilities than by a desire to emulate his predecessors on *Scorchy Smith.*"

Ron Goulart on Bert Christman:

"Christman, too, believed in a world where soldiers-of-fortune like Scorchy Smith and the Three Aces could do some good."

SCORCHY SMITH — **Command Performance**


CIRCLE OVER IT, SCORCHY! — I---I WANT TO SEE EVERYTHING!!
LOOK! THERE'S A CROWD OF DAD'S LUMBERJACKS! — I'LL BET DAD, AN' BONNIE, ARE DOWN THERE, TOO!!
SCORCHY—WOULD YOU DO A FELLA AN EXTRA-SPECIAL BIG FAVOR?— WOULD YOU FLIP AROUND SOME?!— YOU KNOW— KINDA BLOW THEIR HATS OFF?!!
SO— BUZZ YOU'RE JUST A SHOW-OFF!
—WELL--- OKAY, KID— WE'LL BURN THE BUGGY'S TAIL OFF!!— WE'LL PUT ON A SHOW THAT WILL DO CREDIT TO BUZZ CROMBERG'S HOMECOMING!

was such that half the straight strips in the country were trying to imitate it. In explaining to me what he was up to, Sickles said, "My reason for deciding on that style was to make the strip more real What I saw all around me were outline and solid blacks.' He wanted more reality than that traditional cartoon approach made possible. "I wanted to bring it out on the page.' Sickles also wanted to get emotion into his *Scorchy* strips. He felt he was producing a romantic adventure strip, not merely a decorative one. "The thing that always triumphs is romance

. You have to go beyond drawing, beyond technique, you have to have feeling." There shows in all of his work of those years an excitement and a love of drawing He was able to draw anything-- New York street scenes, stretches of jungle, aerial warfare (he would devote an entire week of dailies to a beautifully staged dogfight) and, of course, people He was a master at conveying attitude and he possessed as well a very good sense of time and place. He could suggest the intense light and heat of a desert noon, the shadows of a jungle twilight, the feel of a big city in the early morning He brought to the strip a sort of 1930s lyricism, a combined affection for the pastoral and the mechanical

Sickles added several characters of his own to the cast one of the most notable being Himmelstoss, a German ex-World War I flyer who was briefly a villain before becoming Scorchy s friend and sidekick. An admirer of Von Richtofen, Sickles saw Himmelstoss as a man who might have been a friend of the Red Baron In an effective 1935 sequence Heinie Himmelstoss, trying to raise money by stunting, goes up in a WWI German biplane. Later in the same episode there is a flashback detailing an encounter with American ace, Frank Luke. When it came to planes in flight and in combat, Sickles was able to achieve on paper anything done in films like *Wings* and *The Dawn Patrol*. The autumn of that same year the Noel Sickles version of the Jean Harlow-Carole Lombard brassy blonde was introduced Her name was Mickey, and Scorchy and Heinie meet her while adventuring in Canada. Mickey was a tomboy and never quite as sexy as Caniff's Burma, who made her debut in *Terry And The Pirates* the following February but she was tough enough to hold her own with the timber pirates, gold diggers and crazed Arabs she and her pals ran into while journeying around the globe. A year later Mickey and Himmelstoss decided to get married and they dropped out of the strip forever, leaving Scorchy to fly on alone to yet another South American adventure

That Brazilian plantation sequence would be Sickles last. He was growing tired of the strip and of AP He was, as always, putting in 12-hour days at the drawing board, but his salary had risen to only $125 a week. It was not the Associated Press policy to tell any of its artists how many papers his feature had, nor were salaries based as at most of the larger syndicates, on circulation. Sickles had, by checking through all the out-of-town newspapers that came through the AP offices, determined *Scorchy Smith* was running in nearly 250 papers and should therefore be earning the news service something like $2 500 a week. He'd been thinking lately about trying to move into magazine illustration Since he

had some money saved, he decided to quit. At the end of 1936 his name was no longer appearing on the strip

His replacement also came from the AP bullpen. Allan B. Christman was about 20, hailed from Fort Collins, Colorado. Everybody called him Bert and he is remembered as being "a nice quiet kid." He and Sickles knew each other, though not well, and they never met again after Sickles left the AP. At first Christman's work on *Scorchy Smith* had a shaky borrowed look. He soon, however, developed an effective style of his own, being especially good at depicting the planes and other gadgets so essential to the strip. Christman guided Scorchy through his Brazilian adventure, then took him stateside for a job as a test pilot. Later in 1936 Scorchy is in the Orient, a volunteer in a small air force serving a Chinese general After this prophetic sequence, there were some almost *Lost Horizon*-like doings in the mountains of Tibet before another American adventure. As restless as his hero, Christman stayed with the strip only a year and a half Next he did a few jobs for the newly rising comic books. He was the first artist to draw *The Sandman* in *Adventure Comics* and *The Three Aces* in *Action Comics* This latter feature dealt with 'three winged soldiers-of-fortune, sick of war and tragedy who pledge themselves to a new kind of adventure They came to roam the globe, working for peace and sanity.'

Christman too, believed in a world where soldiers-of-fortune like Scorchy and the Three Aces could do some good After a career in comic books even briefer than that in newspaper strips, he went to Pensacola for training as a Navy flying cadet He then joined Chennault's American Volunteer Group, the Flying Tigers. Some historians believe it was Christman who designed the shark-like nose of all the Tigers P-40s. An eager if not expert pilot, Christman kept requesting combat On his third combat mission, which took place over Rangoon on January 23, 1942, Christman was shot down. He bailed out, and a Japanese plane went after him and machine gunned him Christman, 26, was dead before he hit the ground. It was a new world now, with no place in it for the grinning, slightly innocent daredevil pilots he'd drawn

When Christman left the AP, *Scorchy* spent a prosaic ten months with Howell Dodd another staffer. Dodd, who later became a successful magazine illustrator, didn't want to do the strip at all and he absolutely refused to write it. During his hitch the *Scorchy Smith* scripts were written by comics editor Frank Reilly. Fortunately another exploitable young man came along, in the person of 22 year old Frank Robbins. A native of Boston, Robbins was something of an artistic boy wonder and had been helping win the family bread since his early teens. Though he wanted to be a serious painter, like his friend and contemporary, Jack Levine, from the time his family moved to New York City in the early years of the Depression Robbins had to concentrate on the commercial side of art He worked on the murals for the new Radio City, did promotion art for RKO Pictures served a stretch in a comic book sweat shop. Through a freelance scriptwriter named Bob Farrell, he learned AP was looking for someone to keep the faltering Scorchy aloft With Farrell's help on the scripting, Robbins prepared a week's samples. The samples impressed the Associated Press, as did, no doubt, the fact that he was young and would work cheap. Robbins got the job, his first *Scorchy Smith* daily appearing on May 22, 1939 Farrell stayed on as a writer for eight months and thereafter Robbins took over the production of the whole package.

Although he's often characterized as just one more disciple of the Sickles Caniff School Frank Robbins was never actually that. He arrived at his highly individual impressionist style by his own route, guided more by his own sensibilities than by a desire to emulate his predecessors on *Scorchy Smith*. During his first months Robbins seemed unsure of himself, especially in the important area of depicting airplanes. The early continuities, dealing with mad scientists and lost cities in the jungle peopled with knights in armor, didn't exactly lend themselves to the slick movie-reality style Robbins was working toward. By the time Scorchy got into the Air Force, in 1942, Robbins had everything under control In *The Comics*, Coluton Waugh, a longtime AP artist, said this about one of Robbins major wartime sequences, "Robbins' Russia has a formidable reality; it creates the sense of deep snows, it is full of bitter, bloody struggle.

Early in 1944 Heart's King Features contacted Robbins to ask him if he wanted to take over *Secret Agent X 9*. He didn't, but later discussions resulted in his creating a new adventure strip for King. In its early years *Johnny Hazard* was a virtual twin of *Scorchy Smith* and it's easy to see that Scorchy would've had a much better time had Robbins stuck with him. From 1944 onward a succession of artists worked on the strip. Some such as Edmond Good and George Tuska, were okay Others, like Rodlow Willard unsuited Some, like Milt Morris (who saw *Scorchy Smith* to its final resting place) were godawful. When the strip finally folded in 1960, its great days were long behind. But from 1934 to 1944 Scorchy had had a splendid action-packed decade

* * *

(Two volumes of Sickles' Scorchy Smith *covering most of 1935 and 1936, were published by Nostalgia Press in 1977 and are still available. The only source of Christman's version is long ago issues of* Famous Funnies. *The Robbins version remains in limbo.)* ■

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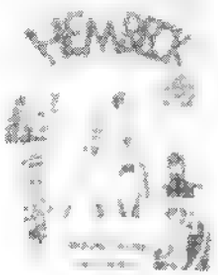

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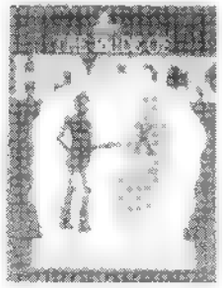

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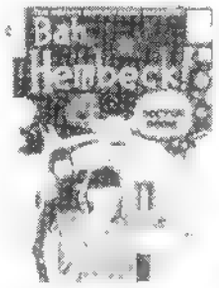

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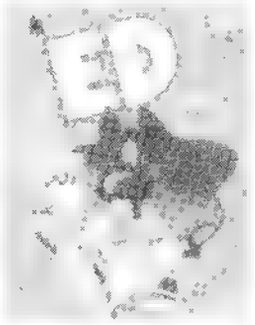

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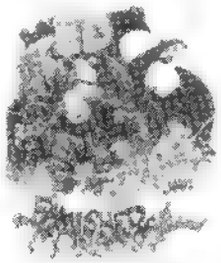

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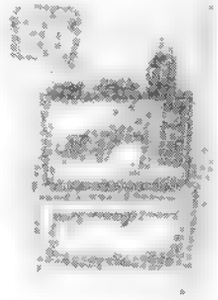

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Creating the Comics

Part One—Writing comic books

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GL CORPS #152 - 10

PAGE SEVEN

Panel 1 QUARZZ is pointing his ring-hand straight into the center of the black hole, pouring as much energy as he can into the beam it's being swallowed up in the darkness of the hole's center.

1 Cap:
Green Lantern knows what must be done-

2 Cap 2:
- He does not know if even the power of his ring can do it

Panel 2: TIGHTER IN on QUARZZ, concentrating harder now really pouring his will power out through his ring into the hole The very center of the darkness in the center of the hole is starting to glow green

3 Cap:
But he will try

Panel 3: VERY CLOSE-IN on QUARZZ, sweating, his brow wrinkled in concentration, just barely holding on.

4 Cap:
As he lives --

Panel 4 FROM BEHIND QUARZZ, he's almost hunched over from the effort really ze zing it out into the center of the black hole, which is now almos all green at the center.

5 Cap.
-- As he is GREEN LANTERN --

Panel 5 BIG PANEL, as the whole shebang goes bang. the black hole is imploding on itself collapsing and releasing bursts of nova-bright light EVERYTHING is going and there's just the explosion

6 Cap:
-- HE WILL TRY!

7 Cap 2
And as he is all these things HE SUCCEEDS

Paul Kupperberg's script for *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* shows the art directions and captions with numbers indicating placement. At left is the pencilled page by Carmine Infantino. Note how closely he followed the instructions

Editor's Note: This is the first installment of a continuing, in-depth series on the nuts and bolts of how comics are created. During the course of the series, we'll be examining each step of the process, from "where do writers get their crazy ideas?" to watching the printed comics come off the presses. This issue we begin by looking at plotting and scripting as it applies to the two major super-hero lines, Marvel and DC Comics.

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

Back in the heyday of comics, the 1940s, many studios sprang up and churned out complete comics for publishers at an amazing rate. There was little concern over continuity or esthetics, just speed. Publishers couldn't sell enough copies and the demand for more was constant.

But these days, with fewer publishers and titles around, the process has been refined and slowed down ... slightly The publishers are still under pressure to prepare their books on schedule so that the giant presses at World Color Press, who print the majority of comics and quite a few magazines, can print the comics on time and get them to the newsstands and specialty shops on time.

How is it done? It begins with an idea. A plot.

Len Wein, currently editing at DC says, "Usually a writer comes in with an idea. Let's assume it's any writer who comes in to do the next issue of *Batman*. He comes in with at least a premise, say Batman vs. the Joker. The editor goes 'swell,' or 'not swell.' If the editor goes 'not swell,' the guy comes in with a new idea. You want to know what the difference is, what the details of the plot are going to be; at this point the writer generally takes it and does a full plot treatment."

'Every series done properly," Wein adds, "should demand stories that could be done for no other series. If you can take a plot and take out Batman and put in Wonder Woman, then you've done a bad story."

Marvel writer J.M. DeMatteis describes the actual plotting like this: "If it's a mystery [or non-series] story, you just sit around and let your brain percolate. Then you come up with five or six ideas and bring them in to an editor, who likes maybe two or three ideas. I have never found ideas to be a problem. You read enough, you see movies and stuff and you have 10 000 ideas in your head.

"I think that half the time there is more story in an eight pager than a 22 page comic. You really construct a nice short story; you could really take any of those mystery stories and have a really, good, strong story, whereas, the other ones tend to become more soap opera-type things. I like mystery stories better, ultimately, and you have more freedom."

DeMatteis believes that the existence of the mystery books helps writers learn how to write comic books. Most of the writers in the past ten years have started

their comic writing careers by doing stories for *House of Mystery, Unexpected* and the others. That list of beginners includes David Michelinie, Micheal Fleisher, Marv Wolfman, Len Wein, Paul Levitz and people currently making their first sales like Tamsyn O'Flynn.

De Matteis continues, "That stuff, the mystery stuff, pops out of your head whole cloth. The super-hero stuff, one you've gotten into the book and you know the characters that tends to write itself a lot. You may come up with an interesting situation, here's this and here's that. I was just running through the next few months worth of *Defenders'* plots and something is going to happen to a character in each one. I might plan to do 'x' one month, but something might happen to another character, telling me 'no, you can t do that, we have to resolve what just happened here.

"As you go along and get involved with the characters, the stories tend to take care of themselves . . . hopefully It's when you sit around and go, 'I don't know what to do with the guy next month, the ultimately you shouldn't be writing that book."

With the plot finished, the writer goes back to the editor and they go over it. Wein says the editor looks for, "any problems with a story s structure, if there are problems with logic, if somebody does something and there's no logical reason he would do that except to advance the story, you try to find a logical reason for him to do that, or change the story to suit.'

The writer-editor conferences may be as short as 30 minutes or go on for hours. For example, when DC needed to plot the *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* miniseries, a gathering took place for several hours. To plot the three issue story, managing editor Joe Orlando sat down with editorial coordinator Paul Levitz, *Green Lantern* editor Jack C. Harris, series writer Marv Wolfman, *Green Lantern's* first editor Julie Schwartz and Wein. From that meeting a plot emerged which Wolfman refined and then turned over to Mike W Barr for further refinement and detailing. The final dialogue came from Wein.

During the plotting phase, the editor and the writer discuss not only the main action but the sub-plots, the character pieces, that will tell a secondary story perhaps over a space of months. "I asked Nelson Bridwell, when I took over *World's Finest,*" Wein says, "to introduce some sub-plots into *Shazam!* because I felt the stories all stood on their own and there was no continuity and there was no reason to come back the following month. He began with a sub-plot with this mystery figure. I said, 'What's he going to do ' He said, 'Don't worry about it. By the time we have to figure him out, we'll know.'

"One of the tricks I've learned as a writer, about sub-plots, is to set up interesting possibilities. I did an issue of *Luke Cage, Powerman,* where a mysterious package was delivered. Over a couple of months, actually a couple of hours in the story's continuity, for several issues, people kept coming in and almost opening the package and then something would distract them and everyone was wondering what the hell was in the package. I had absolutely no idea what was in there but I knew that when the time came, I would have to solve it and I did."

While every editor has his own personal style (i.e. Jim Shooter prefers gut-wrenching tales, Julie Schwartz goes for detailed plots and compact stories), Wein says, "I look for good story-telling, ingenious bits of business and I look for characterization. That's the first thing I look for overall. I would prefer a story with less of a plot and good characterization rather than a story with a brilliant plot and no characterization."

The big difference between writing for Marvel and DC is the legendary Marvel method. Many writers prefer one over the other; Steve Skeates, for instance, says "My style of writing is not geared for Marvel; I don't like doing the script after the artwork is done. A lot of writers prefer doing it that way, I don't." Skeates used to write comics regularly for DC but is now a regular contributor to Marvel's humor magazine, *Crazy,* a noteable exception to Marvel's plot-first method of production.

Wein prefers the Marvel method adding, "I won't call it Marvel style, Marvel only picked up on it; it was used back in the 1940s.

"I like to know what part of story-telling has already been covered by the artwork. From the other way around, I tend to write scripts that would cover any mistakes an artist might make. If I asked for a shot of Superman leaping from a rooftop, if I was working Marvel style I wouldn't

So, You Want to Break Into the Field, eh?

• When Len Wein entered the comics field, nearly 15 years ago, the marketplace was larger and there were few young writers at the time. Originally wanting to be an artist, he tried his luck at DC, along with Marv Wolfman, and the two were told to stick to writing and they have become two of the leading comics writers currently.

• At 13, Jim Shooter was sending in his own drawings and stories featuring the *Legion of Super-Heroes.* Editor Mort Weisinger began buying the stories and Shooter became the youngest person ever to write comics professionally. After the Legion, he began doing stories for the other *Superman* family comics and is currently editor-in-chief at Marvel.

Is it still possible to break into the business today? When a panel of writers was asked at the Creation convention in February, only Tom DeFalco gave a positive reply: "I think it s easier now than ever before. ' But his opinion seems to be in the minority.

"It's more difficult than ever to break into the comics," Shooter says, because there are a large number of professionals around. A 13 year old Jim Shooter couldn't break into comics today while a 13 year old Jim Shooter could break in in 1965. I would have to be a lot better than I was then. The standards have risen and things are a lot more competitive."

Wein agrees with that assessment and adds, "There are fewer comic companies. When I started there were seven or eight major companies to work for, and now there are two. There really isn't that much space in the industry. I think it's a shame."

Wein, like most other editors, will work with a new writer who shows talent and promise, but "if I have a particular fault, it's that I'm not patient enough to work long-distance with new writers." So being in the New York area is an essential ingredient.

J.M. DeMatteis had been sending Paul Levitz plots for a while when he finally went into the city to meet with Levitz. It all started when, "I sent a bunch of samples into DC and, well, over the years I had sent stuff in, I thought I would take one last chance. I got back a letter from whoever the hell was reading submissions at the time, saying, 'Well, you know, we have our staff to write Superman and Plastic Man but Paul Levitz is editing *House of Mystery* and *Weird War Tales* and they always need scripts for that.' I had never heard of them, but I wrote to Paul who sent me back his little writer's kit and I started sending him plots and he sent back nasty letters ripping them apart and eventually I thought I would go down and see him in person and I wrote up a bunch of plots and he liked one and I wrote it up and that was my first sale."

While proximity helped him, so did perseverence. While he started writing regularly for DC, Shooter finally read the submission DeMatteis had sent Marvel at the time and based on only those, Shooter offered work to DeMatteis, who joined Marvel's freelance staff last summer

"So obviously, if your stuff is good enough, you're going to get in," DeMatteis says, "If you're doing the same old crap everyone else is doing, there are plenty of people around doing the same old crap, so why hire someone new to do it. If someone has the talent, you're going to get in."

bother commenting on the fact that he's leaping from a rooftop because the picture is already there. With full-script, I might start a caption by saying 'As Superman leaps from a rooftop . . . ' the picture would show it and the dialogue goes, 'Hey, I'm leaping from a rooftop just to make sure it s there just in case. for some inexplicable reason, the artist goes for a close-up.'

Actual scripting of a comic can be done in several different ways. The script resembles a movie or television script with the addition of directions for page layouts, panel structures and the dialogue. Gerry Conway, for example, draws little schematics of how he expects the page to look, while Skeates writes narrative comics by typing the script like the actual comic page, typing word balloons and captions where he thinks they belong.

DeMatteis personally likes the give-and-take that the plot-first style offers. Working with the right artist, he says, allows the story to actually improve because the artist may come up with some new way to pace a scene, or introduce visual innovations that can make the story much more interesting.

He described the actual process of writing comics as such:

"What I did a couple of months ago was to sit down with Al Milgrom, the *Defenders'* editor and went through the plots for the next six months or so in general terms. I didn t know specifically what was going to go on in each story but I had the general outline of who's coming in, what's happening, what this was going to be about. So that's all worked out. For the book to get on schedule, we've been doing two a month, so we haven't had a chance for the extensive story conferences that we like to have. Don Perlin is waiting for the plot so I briefly discuss it with Al and I write it up. Luckily I have a very good relationship with Al, like I've had with Len at DC, so when I bring it up he may have only a few little things he d like to clean up, nothing major.

"With Don, I also tend to page break-

(Continued on page 65)

Pages from Gene Colan s *Wonder Woman* preview, developed plot-first by Roy Thomas.

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Around the World

Britain's Other Comics

By MIKE CONROY

Editor's Note: Every issue will provide a look at the comics published in other countries, apart from the foreign editions of the DC and Marvel titles. For our first installment, on the British weeklies, we turned to Mike Conroy who operates a successful comic specialty shop in London.

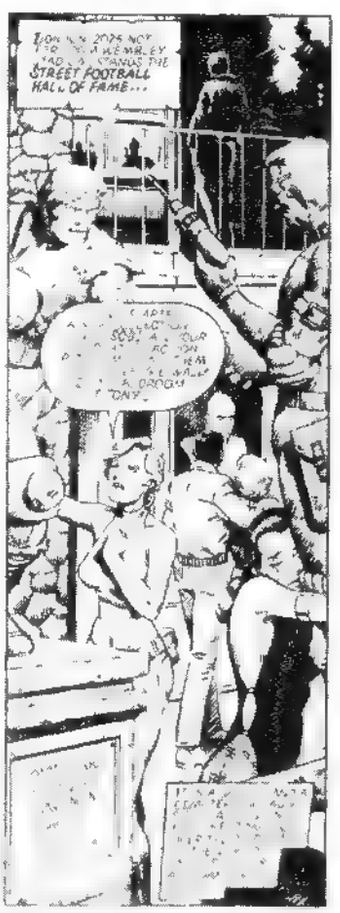
In many ways British comics with titles like *Victor, Warlord, Tracy, 2000 AD, Whizzer and Chips, Dandy and Nutty* will apear very strange to Americans brought up on the super-heroics of Superman and/or the humorous adventures of Richie Rich and the like. The medium may be the same but our approach is altogether different.

To begin with, the British attitude to comics is still suffering from the "comics are for children" syndrome and it is only recently that there have been the faintest rumblings of protest. We are lagging a long way behind the Europeans and even the Americans with our style of comics but the groundwork is even now being laid for new British comics aimed at a more mature audience.

For the time being, however, we must live with a field dominated by two publishing giants—D.C. Thompson & Co Ltd. and IPC Magazines Ltd.—who see their readers ceasing to read comics at 14 and who have their titles aimed at *very* specific markets. There are nursery comics (for the very young) and, once they have been weaned away from them, the children have a choice of humour comics, girls' adventure comics or boys adventure comics.

Whilst it is highly likely that the humour titles and girls adventure titles are as—if not more popular than the boys adventure comics, of necessity it is the latter that this article will concentrate on For those of you used to the open approach of Marvel and DC it might seem strange for you to learn that very little information is readily available from our own two majors

A comparison of the ways in which American and British comics are "packaged" should also prove to be an eye-opener—especially as (until recently) all British comics were published weekly,



The Mean Arena by Tom Tully and Steve Dillon.

not monthly! Even now the only exceptions are the monthly reprints published by Marvel Comics Ltd. Marvel does publish *Dr. Who* (with almost all new material) on a monthly basis, but, as it combines features with comics, it is something of an "oddity" in the first place.

Apart from Marvel's monthly books which are very similar to their American cousins (in that they have glossy covers) almost every other comic produced in the U.K. has covers and interiors printed on the same, cheap paper. Although they almost all differ in size, every one of them is much larger than the traditional American comic—most tend to be nearer magazine size. Only the smallest proportion of the total amount of material published is in colour—black and white is the basic rule

Unlike the books published by Marvel and DC, it is difficult to give an instant idea of the basic "package" as it doesn t exist! Most have 32 pages (including covers) but some—mainly the 'funnies"—have as few as 20 (again including covers) With a number, the stories start on the inside front cover, but others have the story commencing on the front cover right under the title logo Nearly all take the story out on to the back cover although some use that page for pin-ups of aircraft or army vehicles --definitely not of young ladies! Occasionally the back cover is used for advertising, but generally, there is little or no advertising

The cover-price varies from 9p (about 18 cents at current exchange rates) to 15p (about 30 cents) although Marvel's monthly books are as much as $1 but their page count is slightly higher. Over all, 52 (one year's) issues of a U.K. comic would give you between 1040 and 1664 pages of story for between $9.36 and $15.60. The equivalent year's worth of an American Marvel or DC comic would cost upwards of $6 00 for which you would get between 264 and 300 pages of story.

Whilst most American comics contain one story devoted to one "heroic" (or funny) character or team the book and more often than not, titled after him or them—*Superman, Spider-Man, Avengers, All-Star Squadron, Richie Rich* and *Donald Duck*, all British comics are anthology titles with most stories only running 2 or 3 pages each although many are serials.

Apart from *Dr. Who*, there is only one British comic named after a "hero," *Roy of the Rovers*. Roy is a football (soccer, star whose exploits were originally related through the pages of *Tiger*. Of all the many characters created for the U K. market, he is the only one to prove successful enough to have a book titled after him.

Like so many of his contemporaries—and very many of his predecessors (our comics change only slowly) Roy is a sportsman, an example to his readers. A large number of our comics are intended to educate as they entertain and (although is more right than wrong with it) their attitudes harken back to the days when we still had an Empire and the sun never set on it. A majority of the "good guys" of our comics play by the rules

even when their opponents don't. They all carry—as standard issue a stiff upper lip for when the going gets tough they are the sort of men who took the Union Jack to the four corners of the world and, yes, many of them are now anachronisms.

Look through the pages of any of our boys adventure titles and, if you don t see Midshipman Doyle, Union Jack Jackson, Johnny Red and the like *still* fighting World War II, you'll find characters like The Barge Bulldog a barefist boxer—in the early years of the 20th century fighting because it s the only way he knows to get a barge of his own), like Limp-Along Leslie (overcoming his handicap to become a football star). We wouldn't forget The Wolf of Kabul who, with his faithful native servant Chung, is still fighting for the Empire on the North-West Frontier of the 1930s.

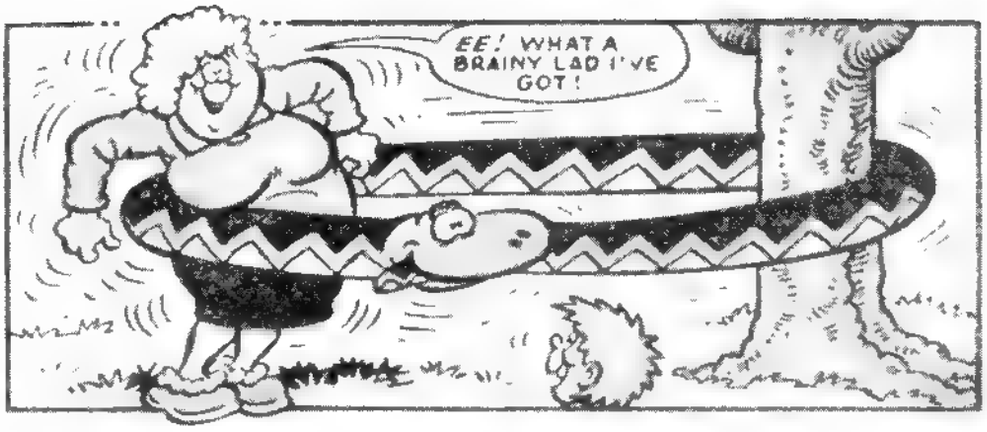
There are exceptions—our comics are full of them but the basic formula must be coming clear by now! We're fortunate when a comic comes along that looks forward instead of back but many s the father who picks up his son's comic only to find it populated with the characters from his childhood—with situations, attitudes and even stories (reprints are fairly common) unchanged.

Whilst most comics are engaged with sports—soccer (especially)and athletics are *very* popular subjects, with school boy "detectives ' and the like or with history—mainly World War II and earlier wars, *2000 AD* is Britain s sole science fiction book and is probably our nearest equivalent to anything available in America

It bills itself as "The Comic of the Future ' and contains strips like *Judge Dredd* (a future cop who is judge, jury and—when necessary—executioner), Strontium Dog (a mutant who is a bounty hunter) and Mean Arena (about a violent form of football played on the streets). *2000 AD* is very different from the rest of our comics and has gone a step further than most by becoming one of the very few (British) titles to credit the writers and artists; the only others currently giving credit are *Battle Action* and Doctor Who

There are many British artists and writers who go unsung but—though *2000 AD*—overdue exposure has been given to artists like Brian Bolland (his recent American work includes the covers for DC's *Tales of the Green Lantern Corps* mini-series and the back-up strip for their *Madame Xanadu* one-shot) and Dave Gibbons (he's permanent artist on *Doctor Who* for Marvel UK and his work on that title was recently reprinted—in America—in *Marvel Premiere 57 60*. He s also slated to adapt *The Time Bandits* for Marvel later this year)

Incidentally unlike America—it is very unusual for two artists (penciler and inker) to work on the same strip. In Britain it is usual for one artist to work on each story—inking his own pencils, lettering *is* normally done by another.



The popular *Whizzer and Chips* can be found every Monday

Bolland and Gibbons are not the only people working in British comics by a long shot, but they are the two whose work is most likely to be familiar to you. Mike McMahon, Steve Dillon, Martin Asbury and John Burns are among the artists worthy of mention along with writers like Steve Moore, Steve Parkhouse, Pat Mills and John Wagner (the latter two were responsible for the *Doctor Who* story reprinted in *Marvel Premiere 57-60* and Steve Parkhouse wrote the story of *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* #12—one of the earliest stories Barry Smith did for Marvel)

One feature of the early issues of *2000 AD* was a revival of *Dan Dare* our first "pilot of the future". One of Britains most well known comic heroes, he originally appeared during the 1950s and early 1960s on the front page of the (sadly defunct) *Eagle* comic. *Eagle* is reckoned by many to be the very best comic to have been published in Britain and sadly, has never been equalled although *TV Century 21* (also no longer published) was a worthy competitor.

Another "comic no longer around but still worth mentioning is *House of Hammer* ,the last few issues were distributed in America under the title *Halls of Horror*. *HoH* was a film magazine with a strong bias towards Hammer s horror movies and, like the current *Doctor Who*, it carried a mixture of articles and comics. The comics were mainly adaptations of Hammer movies but some excellent original material (*Father Shandor* being probably the best example) was also featured.

HoH was probably the first British publication to give full credit to comic artists and writers and, through its pages, such talents as John Bolton (the artist on *Father Shandor* and recently premiered in America with the beautiful *King Kull* tak for Marvel's *Bizarre Adventures*) and the late Brian Lewis achieved much-deserved recognition One of Brian's stories appeared in Warren s *Eerie* magazine shortly after his death.

A sample of John Bolton's work

Of necessity, this article has only skimmed the surface of British comics and many talented people have gone unmentioned. The deaths of such great artists as Frank Bellamy, Jim Holdaway and Brian Lewis left a great hole but others like those mentioned earlier and more are lessening the loss and creating their own claims to fame.

Among our artists and writers are some of the best talents in the world. They are often overlooked because of the lack of concern shown by our publishing companies, but their day is coming.

Britain has a lot more to show the world of comics and, if you want to know about it, we want to hear from you. ■

NEXT ISSUE: An in depth look at Judge Dredd, *possibly the most unique British creation to surface in years.*

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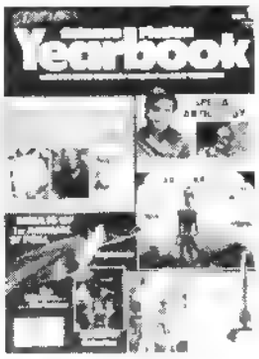

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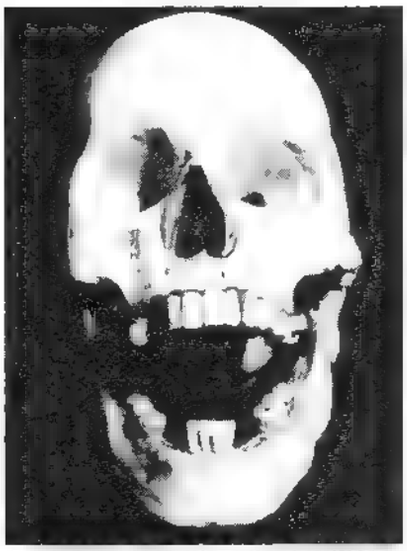

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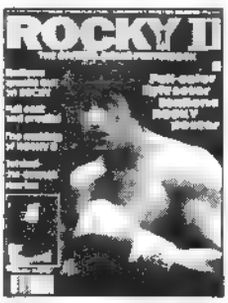

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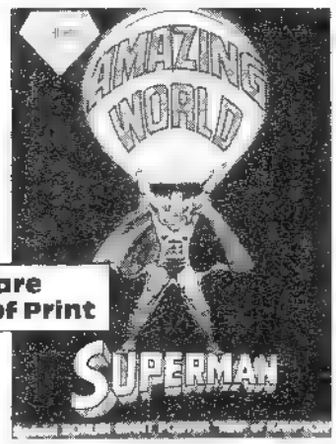

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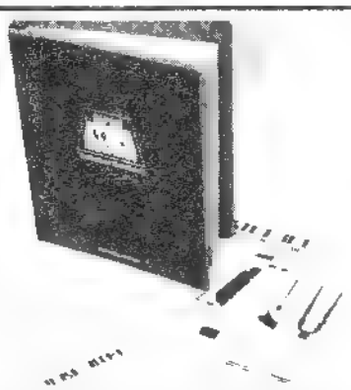

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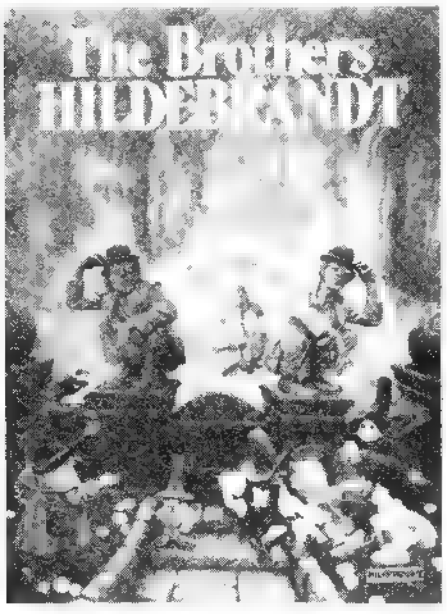

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Howard Zimmerman

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Clearing the Clouds Away

Heavy Metal is on the upswing with both the movie's release and a refocused outlook

By ROBERT GREENBERGER

It's been over a year since publisher Len Mogel fired Ted White as editor of *Heavy Metal* to take the title himself. It's also been just over three months since Mogel's dream movie has opened in hundreds of theaters around the country. With all the hoopla surrounding White's departure and the movie's coming many people have not noticed a quiet change in the magazine's structure.

Today there are more stories worth reading as well as oggling; text features by some notables and interviews with the artists behind the stories are being presented. It still costs you $2 but suddenly it's more worth the expense

The reason this change has come about is a result of the editorial outlook being solidified by Mogel and executive editor Julie Simmons-Lynch. The period of time the magazine has had to make due without material from *Metal Hurlant* has made the editors more selective about what they will publish

Still there are some problems plaguing the magazine, especially now that the magazine's novelty has worn off after nearly five years of publication. Some of these problems have been addressed while others are still being identified.

When White left the magazine last August, he was highly critical of the way the company functioned. As recently as this spring, he continued to find fault with the company, especially the editorial approach, said to favor art over story.

Not only did White find fault with the story content of America's first "Adult Illustrated Fantasy Magazine" but the readers also voiced their complaints.

In her quiet, naturally-lit office, Simmons-Lynch agreed with the sentiments. The brown haired, comfortably dressed young editor says, "I think up until this year, I would have been in total agreement with that statement. I think there are times when I had to read stories two and three times for me to understand them and that's pretty sad when you think I m on the staff."

This period of incomprehension proceeded and continued during White's tenure on the magazine. He told the Binghamton *Sun-Bulletin* in the spring of 1980 that the stories were for a sophisticated reader and were of such heady stuff that it required two or four readings to properly get the feel for the story's meaning.

Simmons-Lynch agrees adding, "There's no doubt about it. A lot of the material appearing in the magazine at one time was very hard to understand. I think we've moved away from that. I think at times *Heavy Metal* is very confusing because of the art and the text of the strips is translated from the European magazines. You try and Americanize the text and try and make it understandable for the reader. '

The reader is an American male, between 10-39 with an upper scale income and college education as revealed by a survey conducted two years ago. A much more detailed study was conducted this spring and Simmons-Lynch feels the basics will not have changed much at all. These readers have been weaned on comics-code approved books, with all the restrictions on subject matter and storytelling approaches that the code requires. The comics, being printed on pulp paper with letter presses, were also limited to how much detail can be put into the artwork and how much color could be used.

An alternative to that process came in the form of *Heavy Metal*, premiering four years ago. Legend has it that Len Mogel and his wife found *Metal Hurlant* in France and were captivated by the dramatically different printing and story telling. At that time, in 1976, Mogel had successfully been publisher of *National Lampoon* after many years as the publisher of *Signature*, the Diner's Club magazine. The concept of an American version of the French comics magazine led Mogel into making contact with *Metal Hurlant* and the first issue of *HM* premiered in March, 1977. Literally, the French title translates to "Screaming Metal" which Mogel Americanized to *Heavy Metal*, being somewhat influenced by the rock music form. The magazine, from the start, mixed French translations with American stories. Sean Kelly, the first editor, and Mogel brought people like Richard Corben in the beginning and gave the magazine a very slick look. They also allowed artists to retain the copyright to their work, something unheard of in American comics.

Distributed by Independent News, now Warner Publisher Services, the magazine turned up all over the place and was received very favorably, especially by story hungry college students with appetities that far exceeded the Marvel output aimed at younger audiences.

At first the graphic violence and nudity startled people accustomed to the code-approved comics; later, it was virtually a

-S NOT A BRAIN IN HIS HEAD. BUT WHAT A FINE BAD! TIONERS TO HIM THE PLOT THIS EVENING WILL BE CARRIED OUT ERFECTLY. THE ECURITY SERVICE IS N OPERATION AT THE ERY MOMENT I'LL BE N CHARGE OF THE PERATION, OF COURSE.
CALM DOWN, AMAN!.
EVEN SO, I DIDN'T EXPECT THAT FROM VERTEGOUTTE
OH THAT BASTARD
WHY DON'T WHEEEEEZE
MMMMM
OLLE, NO! DON'T GO THERE!
I HAVE TO, I'M A CLOWN. IT'S OBVIOUS I'M BEING SENT THERE!

The French artists represented in *Heavy Metal* go from the straight to the surreal

trademark of the magazine and its success led both Marvel and Warren to launch competitive magazines in a similar direction. Warren jumped first with *1984* (now *1994*) a magazine that has never approached the sophisticated level of *HM*, specializing in low-grade sexual innuendo and sophomoric stories. After a lot of development, Marvel released *Epic Illustrated* last winter and has been successful enough to go from quarterly to bi-monthly. Neither Simmons-Lynch nor Mogel feel *Epic* is a direct competitor; Simmons-Lynch feels the magazine goes for a younger crowd. However, both welcome the magazine as a reaffirmation that they were doing the right thing

"*HM* is a very different kind of magazine, no doubt about it," Simmons-Lynch says. "Partially the nudity and violence in comics form has frightened a lot of people. The violence up until now in the comic book form has been restricted by the comics code, except for Warren and they once did some really nice work. It was partially written for little kids and it was written down to little kids. *Heavy Metal* was almost a phenomenon in this country and we were swayed a little by the pretty pictures. We don't want to do that anymore and I think the readers are very, very justified in complaining about the stories, those that complained. A lot of readers didn't, though. They felt it was almost an escape to read something that didn't make sense but got a kick out of it."

Ever since its inception, *HM* has been very reliant on *Metal Hurlant* material which led the American magazine to run into conflicts with their European counterpart. At one point, the contractual obligations forced the editors to use almost 33 pages of European material in every issue so that all of the contracted work would appear in print by the end of 1980. This led to bad feelings and miscommunication on both continents. Finally, earlier this year, Mogel and the French kissed and made up, as Simmons-Lynch likes to put it. Beginning with the issue on sale this month, the magazine once again will be printing material from *Metal Hurlant*.

Heavy Metal subscribes to numerous graphic story magazines from which they use material. This list includes the French *Pilote*, Spanish and Japanese magazines as well as items from Germany and all around Europe. One reason the magazine is so reliant upon foreign material is economic

"I have to admit, and it's unfortunate but not all of us speak all of the languages and our first impressions are based upon how the strip *looks*. If we all like the looks we will bother having it translated, or have a synopsis prepared. What might happen, and we're not aware of it, is that here can be a strip with a fantastic story line, but if the art isn't up to par, unfortunately we'll go right over it.

"The thing is,' Simmons-Lynch admits, "it's difficult for us and it's frustrating as hell; we get a lot of strips from many foreign magazines and we already get them separated (prepared for color printing), which cuts our production costs by almost two-thirds So of course we tend to go with a French or European artist, as long as the standards are being met, before we go with an American artist who we have to separate ourselves. That costs a lot more. That's why the magazine is balanced 50-50 or even 60-40 in favor of the Europeans."

And it pays to wait sometimes, too. They purchased a Berni Wrightson series and waited six months because the story was going to be delivered by Neal Adams, who acted as Wrightson's agent, already separated, again saving them huge amounts of time and money.

There is also the need to buy series as opposed to stories because Simmons-Lynch says artists prefer to work in longer formats ranging from 44-66 pages. This forces the magazine to serialize tales, which also affects the issue's balance. Sometimes they are forced to run upwards of five or six series an issue which they admit is a little unfair to the casual reader.

"It s difficult for some artists to do the pages every month," she says. For this reason, the *Tex Arcana* strip, already in its seventh installment, will be taking a short sabbatical. "The way we're doing it, you run a self-contained story in February and then you can drop it for a couple of issues and pick it up again in May. *Tex Arcana* will be ending in the September issue and he'll be taking a two month sabbatical from us and vice versa.'

Mogel is also very strongly in favor of the magzine using the foreign material, serialized or not, because he feels it s much stronger than the American comics. "I took over as editor of the magazine and I have no background in science fiction or comics," he explains, "but I had learned what kind of material I wanted to run in this magazine and I really didn't want to argue with any editor who disagreed with me. I still have a strong favoritism for the European material. The Americans, with a few exceptions, mainly Corben, still cannot do comics the way Europeans can. And I decided I wanted my own opinion to prevail.

After Mogel, Simmons-Lynch and art director John Workman (who is an all-around whiz at production, she happily asserts) look through the foreign magazines. If they agree a story looks good enough, Mogel s pretty assistant, Chris Miner, will translate the story. As foreign rights manager, Miner has fluent command of both Spanish and French and, with the help of a dictionary, can pretty much understand Italian and German. If other languages need translating, they always have someplace to turn

When dealing with the foreign material, *HM* deals directly with the magazine, never the artist. "For the most part," Simmons-Lynch says, "we can't work directly with artists like Moebius, Bilal and Caza because they're tied up with contracts with *Pilote* and *Metal Hurlant*. When our relationsip is amiable with the

magazines, there is no need, really, to work with them directly.'

So it seems the troubles with the foreign magazines have been worked out and the editors are looking for better and stronger stories. With few exceptions, *HM* used to deal with just a single creator. Now they are taking the time to match artists with writers. "We're trying to do that now as part of our effort to get stronger stories. We didn't look at manuscripts because we didn't have the manpower to read them but now we're meeting with artists and writers individually and we're matching them up. Yeah, it may be more work, but it s a lot more fun and it s better for the magazine, ' she says happily.

The writers and the artists are allowed quite a bit of freedom with the magazine although some critics say the magazine is *too* far out. "That tends to be our biggest problem with the readers. We had an artist do a strip where he had a young girl and her father get lost on a trip It was a very strange trip, wonderfully illustrated, but things went along and there was a sex scene between the father and the girl. That's were we cut it short. No incest. Besides how we may feel personally, there is a boundary; you have to stop somewhere."

On the other hand, in the strip "Valentina" it's perfectly alright to have the heroine make love frequently with an alien. Simmons-Lynch wonders who is going to object, but think: would you bring an alien home to mother? "You certainly have to have an open mind to read *Heavy Metal,*" she adds. "We say it right there on the cover. We never say we re *Jack and Jill* or *Highlight.*"

After bouncing back and forth and coming or going, the magazine also seems to have settled down with text features. Every issue will contain a guest editorial, inaugurated by Harlan Ellison after the John Lennon murder. Contributing editor Brad Balfour was brought in to helm the text features and aid the rest of the staff. Balfour, lanky and dark haired, is now the magazine's voice, choosing the guest editorial writer, packaging the two-page review section and writing the magazine's opening editorial. He also conducted the extensive, rambling and overlong Corben interview which was unnecessarily spread over three issues. The interview even drew Corben's wrath as evidenced by his letter in the September issue

Mogel explains that he doesn't want to see the magazine discuss matters that other magzines do already. "We ll have things like a rock musician review a book or movie or have a director review a rock act. Something like that, just a little short item. This is the kind of thing done effectively in *Metal Hurlant* and although we're not modeling them exactly, that's the idea we have in mind. '

There will also be an occasional gallery section highlighting new and upcoming graphic books. Included will be things like the new Byron Preiss book on the art of Leonard Dime Dillon coming from Ballentine and Simmons-Lynch says she would love to see a column on fantasy books for children.

In essence, the magazine has grown out of its infancy and is beginning to mature, take on a definite shape and grow into it. No longer an off-beat item on the newsstand, the magazine must now retain its audience and enlarge it. In fact, the audience, while very loyal, is stagnant.

Ever since the magazine s inception, sales have hovered around the 150,000 copy-a-month mark. "It has been constant over four years. That s part of our problem,' Simmons-Lynch says. "It's so frustrating that you do a good product and it doesn t go up, it doesn't go down. The publisher might take action if we went down but we have a nice package and it's stable there is a readership there. We hope with the movie, *Heavy Metal* will be a name everywhere. '

But even after four years, she admits the magazine has a low recognition factor. The problem, she admits, is that the magazine doesn't have the kind of money necessary for a media blitz to get the name out. It's a small, five-man operation

(Continued on Page 64)

One Heavy Movie

The public seems to have finally found *Heavy Metal.* The movie, released August 7 by Columbia, has been doing fairly well at the box office in its first few weeks Columbia reports it has made, at press time, over $20 million—not a bad figure.

On the other hand, the critics were harsh with the film. The New York *Daily News* gave the film no stars out of four and wrote, "It's hard enough to make a movie out of a good book. *Heavy Metal* is proof positive that it's an even stupider idea to try and make one out of a bad magazine."

"Animated or not this isn't a movie to take children to, unless you'd like them to develop an early interest in bondage," Janet Maslin concluded in the New York *Times.*

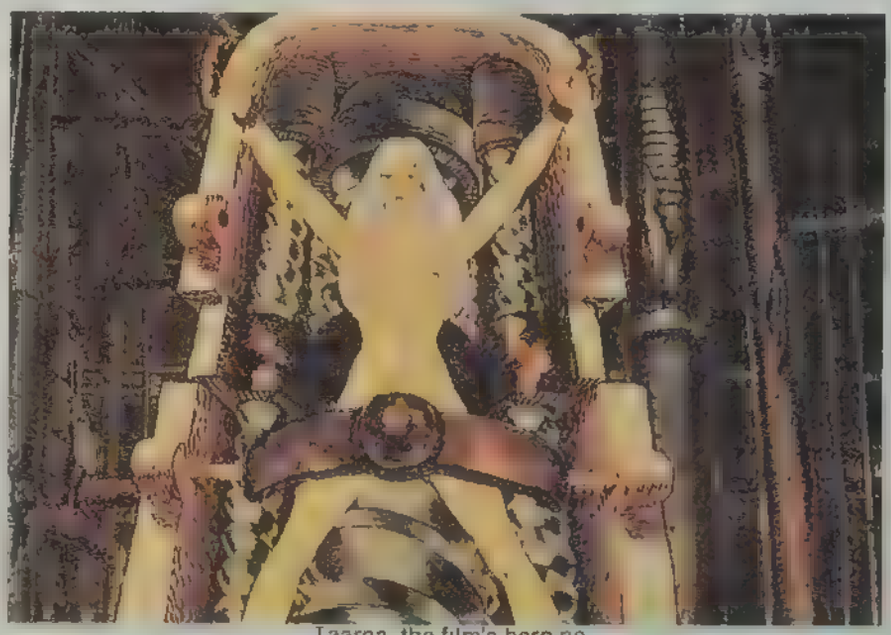
Both *Newsweek* and *Time* highly criticized the film's animation, promised to be the best animation since the classic Disney films. Most everyone complained about the linkage device, a green meteor claiming to be the totality of evil in the cosmos

Fans of the magazine found the film's faults to echo the magazine's. Almost every story was filled with brutal violence (even if the blood was green) and naked women drawn to adolescent perfection . . . and they all made love freely. While the art styles attempted to be different, readers and audience said, the stories were so similar it made no difference. Also, the highly touted music was mostly lost behind dialogue and sound effects

Some sequences for the film remained on the cutting room floor, a very expensive move on the part of Producer Ivan Reitman. One missed sequence included a two minute history of the world and mankind linking "Captain Sternn" to "B-17."

The movie is very similar to the magazine that inspired it; just as it should be. However, the film was so different compared to recent movie fare, including the incredibly trite *American Pop,* that the audience, especially the average movie goers between 15-30 have been lining up to get a glimpse at some animated high adventure

Reitman and production designer Michael Gross have said they want to make a sequel. Considering the Canadian investors were payed off before opening and Columbia stands to make a good profit from the movie, a sequel is almost a natural.



Taarna, the film's heroine

Super Saturday Mornings

A look at how the seasons change and what shapes them

By SAM MARONIE

September is the month when the three networks unveil their fall television lineups. While another strike has again delayed the start of the evening prime-time schedule, the Saturday-morning series made their debut on time.

Of course there isn't the general interest or excitement reserved for the nighttime productions. But these weekend offerings carry a large following of highly discriminating viewers who hold definite opinions about their favorite shows.

This season in particular continues to follow the trend of the past few years, offering something old and something new in formats and subject matter. As a result, three main categories of Saturday morning series clearly dominate the schedule.

The more sophisticated and realistically animated SF/Fantasy adventure programs are making a big showing this season. Encouraged by the rousing success of ABC's *Thundarr* last year, CBS is offering *Blackstar*, a sword and sorcery effort that is supposed to appeal to a slightly older crowd. Ruby Spears Productions, brought us *Thundarr*, has served up *Goldie Gold*, featuring a crusading newspaper publisher's daring exploits. Even revived versions of *Space Ghost* and *The Herculoids* can be found by the series old fans.

Certainly comedy is still kind of Saturday mornings. Such staple characters as *Daffy Duck*, *Bugs Bunny* and *Popeye the Sailor* have all returned for yet another go round. Joining these stalwarts are newcomers like *Kwicky Koala* (created by the late animator, Tex Avery), *Laverne & Shirley* and *Crazy Claws*.

Little people also figure big in this season's roster, with CBS and NBC represented by some exotic species of wee folk. There promises to be enough *Smurfs*, *Trollkins* and *Trobbits* to satisfy the most devoted afficionado of such fantasy creatures.

Each succeeding year the competition

Opposite CBS' latest hit, *Blackstar*. Above, ABC's *SuperFriends* have outlasted many trends in their seven years.

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among shows and characters becomes fiercer. Writers, artists and producers scurry frantically to develop just the right format and the right gimmicks to catch the viewer's fancy

Why the scrambling? Why the brain-wracking labor to create new characters and concepts? After all, the kids don t really *care,* do they? Won t they watch just about anything that s beamed into their homes without complaint?

Such obtuse thinking was the norm for network strategists for many years, until they looked at their ledgers and realized just how profitable Saturday mornings could be for them

From a purely business standpoint, animated series are ideal moneymakers They are produced for a relatively low cost—anywhere from one-fifth to one-fourth the cost of a comparable live-action, prime-time segment—and they require no temperamental actors who may threaten to storm off the set and hold out for hefty salary increases.

More importantly, commercial time for children s programs commands a lucrative rate charge Sponsors, anxious to peddle their wares to an eager young audience, stand in line to pay large fees for a 30- or 60-second spot on Saturday mornings. During the Christmas season especially, there is literally not enough commercial time to sell to all potential customers, many accounts routinely reserve berths years in advance for toy game and other holiday product sales

Television was in existence for many years before the economics of Saturday morning programming encouraged network executives to pay much attention to children s shows. In the early days of television, Saturday morning fare featured little more than resurrected theatrical cartoons, and Hanna-Barbera efforts like *Yogi Bear* and *Huckleberry Hound.* True, there were several filmed, live-action shows *(Sky King, Sheena, Wild Bill Hickock,* etc.) but little was of any real quality

The networks were content to meander along with such lackluster programs until the 'camp *Batman* show of the mid-1960s became a phenomenon. Saturday mornings would never be the same again

Gone for the most part were the funny rabbits, cute mice and other anthropomorphic critters. In their stead swooped a horde of costumed do-gooders like *Birdman, Frankenstein Jr.,* and *The Impossibles,* all trying to cash in on the latest superhero craze Most did not last very long, victims of both limited creativity and mediocre execution.

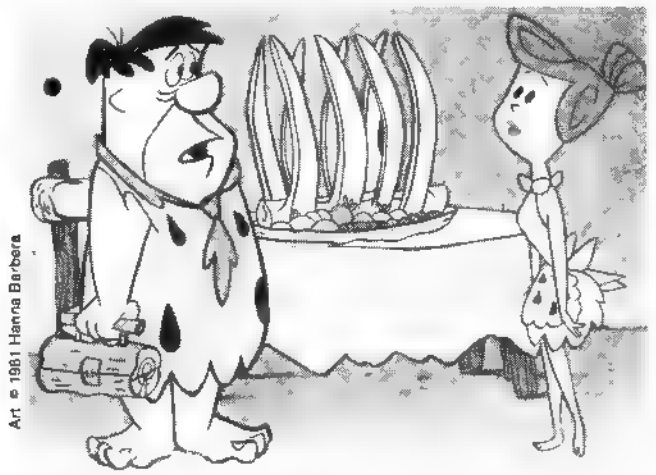
The influence of superhero programming was drubbed soundly by PTAs and other parent groups for the cartoons alleged violence and horrific situations One article that appeared in *TV Guide* featured an illustration depicting Bugs, Daffy and other previous Saturday favorites bolting in terror from an ominous-looking group of costumed crimefighters The networks ultimately succumbed to the pressure groups and eliminated most of the superhero programs for the lineup

While adults were less than thrilled with such cartoon fare, young viewers found several appealing high-spots *Space Ghost* was an admirable although juvenile ffort featuring a spectral guardian of the galaxy *The New Adventures of Superman,* one of Filmation Studios first series, was largely faithful to the comicbook mythos and pleased many. Even Marvel half-heartedly jumped on the bandwagon with a poorly crafted package of syndicated cartoons based on their own legion of do-gooders

As the 1960s came to a close there were still a few superheroes left around. Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four appeared in classier, better-animated adventures. Superman also stayed around a while longer, teamed with Aquaman, and later with Batman and several other DC characters. But the long-underwear heroes were on the way out

With an increase in the number of teenagers preoccupied with rock music, the networks began to aim their programs at an older segment of the audience. There were still plenty of shows to appeal to the pre-school set, but as teen spending-power increased, the producers—and advertisers began to cater to adolescents with various forms of programming

Perhaps the series most responsible for lighting the fuse of this teen-explosion was the animated exploits of Archie Andrews, Jughead and their pals. Due to the



The Flintstones can always be depended upon for ratings points.

Thundarr may have started a new trend for Saturday morning shows—*if* it can get around the censors.

popular comic book series, a ready-made audience for these characters already existed and the show caught on quickly

The successful *Archie* series was aided vastly by the singing group featured prominently in the show. This band, called, of course, *The Archies*, cut several hit records and did much to initiate a splinter form of rock music popularly called "bubblegum." More importantly, *Archie* heralded the extensive use of modern music in cartoon series, a practice which continues today in such programs as *The Kid Super Power Hour.*

Archie experimented with a new format for Saturday morning programming' taking on the format of prime-time variety shows like *Carol Burnett* and *Laugh-In*, the series featured a lightning-fast array of stories, sketches, sight gags, big musi cal production numbers and blackouts To fully complete the resemblance, canned laughter was inserted.

Archie's phenomenal success bred the inevitable spin-offs *Josie and the Pussy Cats* and *Sabrina the Teen-Age Witch* were other comic book-inspired series utilizing the vaudeville show format

During the early 1970s Sid & Marty Krofft brought their live-action, people-and-puppets formula to Saturday mornings with such programs as *Lidsville, the Banana Splits,* and *The Bugaloos.* These series were low-budget, videotaped productions featuring imaginative costumes and effects. Top name stars were cast in many roles an unheard of practice for such programs; performers like Martha Raye, Mark Wild and Cass Elliot were on hand for the wild events

While The Beatles starred in an animated ABC series of cartoons during their heyday, other singing groups began to spring up in their own cartoon incarnations *The Jackson Five* helped initiate a trend in this direction and were soon oined by such groups as *The Osmonds* and, later, *The Brady Kids.*

A similar practice was introduced as cancelled prime time sit-coms began to edge their way into the Saturday morning schedules. *The Addams Family, Emergency, My Favorite Martian,* and *Gilligan's Island* all made the transition from live-action to cartoon adventures. In many cases, the original actors were on hand to vocally recreate their roles.

As job opportunities in Hollywood diminished, many performers were more than anxious to participate in these animated versions. The actor could drop in to the recording studio for a few hours and tape his lines. The money was appealing, and an increasing number of stars

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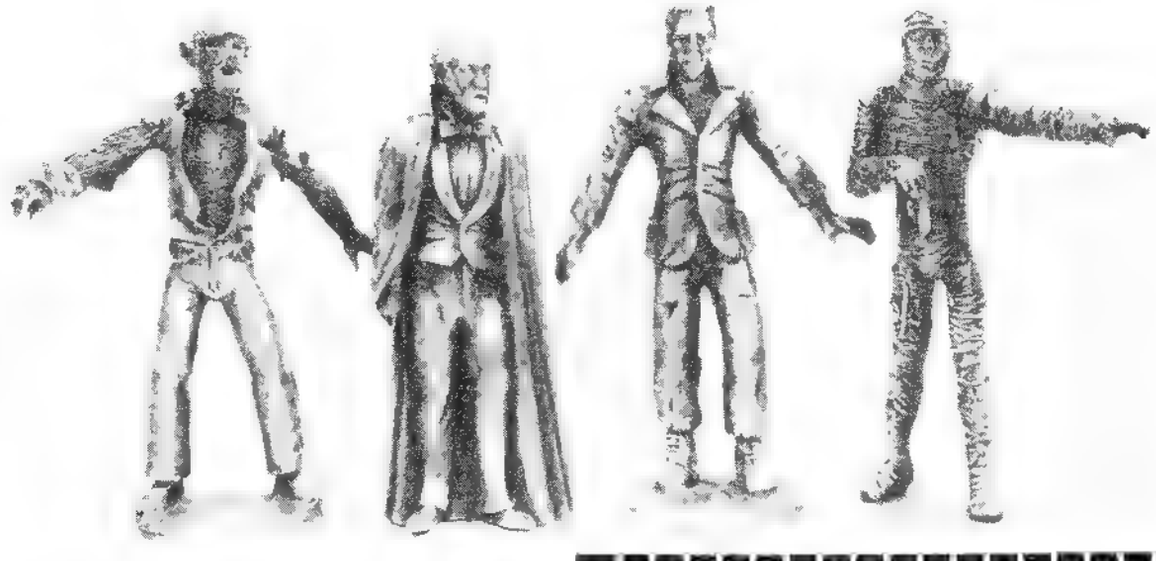

The night is black and stormy. You sit up in your bed as lightening cracks the sky. Eeery sounds invade your room heavy footsteps in the hallway, the flapping of batwings at your window, a horrifying, half-human howl! You feel an icy grip close in around your neck as you lunge out of bed and flip on the light. And there they are—the Wolfman, Dracula, Frankenstein and the Mummy!

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Photo © 1981 Filmation

Isis was one of many shows to jump on the short-lived live-action bandwagon.

were doing it and continue to do so. This season, for instance, Penny Marshall and Cindy Williams reprise their *Laverne & Shirley* roles for the new animated series.

The biggest success in the live-action-to-animated transference is unquestionably Filmation's *Star Trek* cartoon series. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy and the rest of the original Enterprise crew vocally recreated the roles for which they were so well known. Intelligently produced and competently animated, the program was a jewel among the rest of Saturday morning offerings. Top-notch stories from the show's scripters like D.C. Fontana, David Gerrold and Sam Peeples contributed to its wide appeal among various age groups, and helped win an Emmy for the show.

Running a close second to *Trek* in the limited company of more sophisticated cartoon fare was the wonderfully-rendered *Flash Gordon* series of two seasons ago. Also produced by Lou Scheimer's Filmation Studios, *Flash* showcased some top-notch animation and stories that ranked the series high above its competition. Unfortunately, as in prime time, quality does not always translate into big ratings and the series enjoyed only a limited run.

Superheroes attempted a comeback in the mid-1970s, but never approached the mid-1960s boom. *The Superfriends* continued along with a second animated *Batman* series that featured many of the Caped Crusader's supporting characters and colorful villains. There was also a live action *Shazam*, featuring the adventures of the original Captain Marvel. Except for his name and costume, format alterations left little of the original comic-book character. The Big Red Cheese spent more time handing out lectures on bicycle safety and good citizenship than putting the skids on bad guys. This season the good Captain makes a comeback, adhering to the adventurous comics elements in an animated cartoon version.

Saturday morning was quick to reflect another craze when *Star Wars* made the whole industry science-fiction-conscious. Mundane cartoon characters like *Casper the Friendly Ghost* and *Josie and the Pussycats* introduced SF elements, and even the ancient *Jetsons* series was dusted off for a return engagement. As far as live-action was concerned, *Jason of Star Command* and *Space Academy* were laudable attempts at doing SF on a limited Saturday morning scale.

While children's programming provides a good helping of laughs and thrills for young viewers, there are many who are highly critical of the medium. Saturday morning shows have long been termed a video "ghetto" for children; according to critics, little of substance is offered beyond mild entertainment and amusement. Many adult pressure groups like the Boston-based Action for Children's Television have had their effect on the networks. While Saturday morning is still entertainment-oriented, an increasing number of informational and educational spots have been added to the schedule.

Perhaps the severest criticism against current programming comes from the Moral Majority's Coalition for Better TV. The organization has rallied a sizeable number of sympathizers in its attempts to clean up television. While the CBTV's aims lie mostly in the area of what they consider "objectionable" prime-time TV, Saturday morning shows are also part of their target. The strategy is simple: hit the networks where it hurts the most—in the pocketbook—by convincing large advertisers to withdraw sponsorship from certain programs. This strategy has been directed primarily at eliminating violence on children's shows.

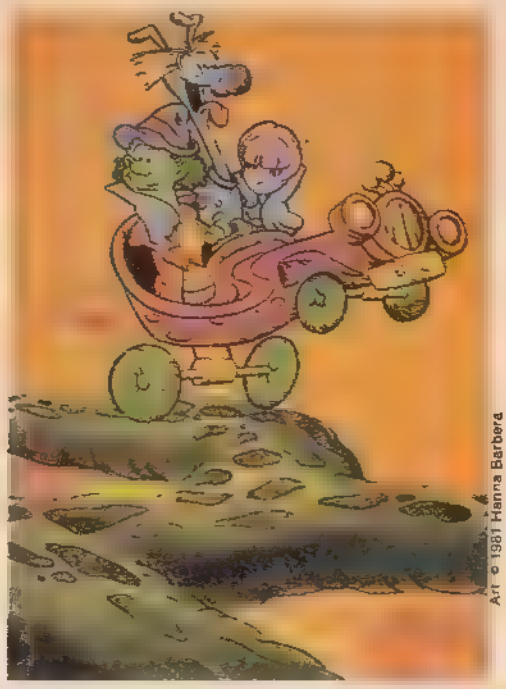
Some professionals have not been pleased with the new emphasis. In a recent interview, Steve Gerber, story editor for *Thundarr*, said the restrictions on violence imposed by the networks have gotten way out of hand. Gerber, perhaps the most vocal opponent of these TV pressure groups, says he cannot have Thundarr throw a punch or even so much as trip an adversary. Superheroic action, he points out, has been sharply, and unreasonably, curtailed for fear that children will mimic these moves.

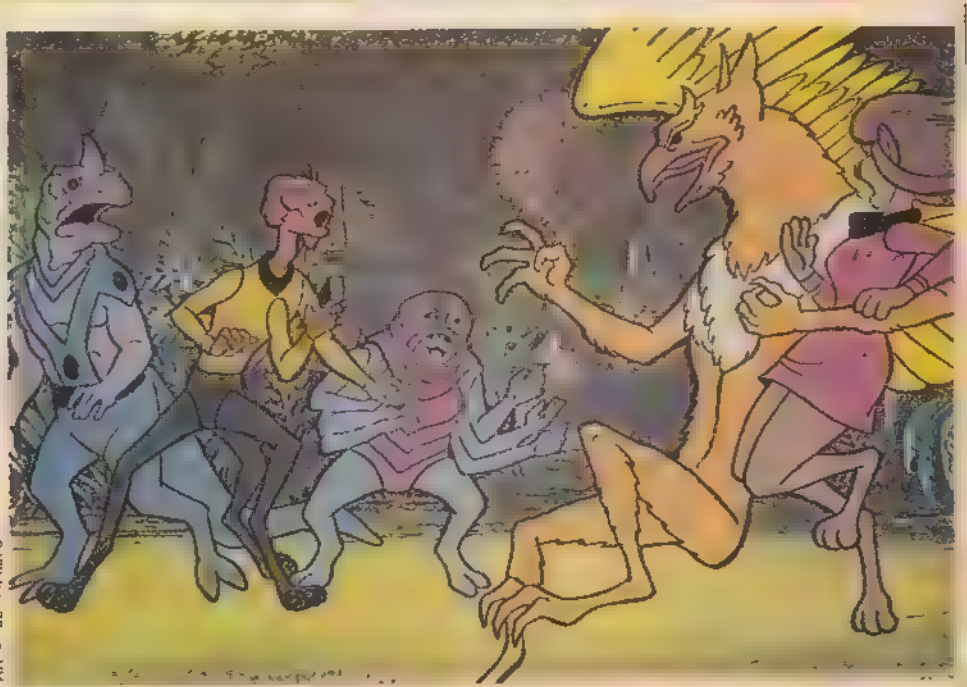
In an unpublished letter to *TV Guide*, Gerber wrote:

The psychologists, not the writers, producers, directors, or even the network executives, are responsible for ruining the medium that brought *Superman, Sky King, Fury, Commando Cody*, et al into my childhood. The psychologists, with their absurd view that conflict, the basis of all drama, is somehow injurious to children, and with their universe of 'warm human relationships' in which no one knows strong emotion, no one commits aggression, no one dies—they are the monsters, the liars, the vandalizers of the human spirit.

"Their intent can be summed up simply: they want television to do for their children what Valium does for them.

"As one who works in children's television, I know already that there is no basis for communication with these people. Their statistics are sacrosanct, their convictions unshakeable. I only hope the viewing public can see past the sham and listen to that peculiar *whirring* sound of Mark Twain, Robert Louis Stevenson and Louisa May Alcott spinning in their graves." ■





Captain Marvel as he appeared on TV: first as live-action and currently as an animated feature. The new *Trollkins*, top right, is a fantasy show while Zorro, bottom right, returns to the old West. The animated *Star Trek*, middle right, attempted to introduce more aliens both on board and on planets

Feeding Dreams, Cutting Cords

By HOWARD CRUSE

I was 16 when I visited Milton Caniff in his studio.

It was heady stuff for a boy raised in Springville, Alabama. I always think of Springville when I see the movie *The Last Picture Show*. Take away the Texas sagebrush and you've got my childhood stomping grounds, complete with mood music by Hank Williams

Springville was born as a watering hole for stagecoaches heading west by the Southern route. Its population was less than a thousand when I lived there, and it hasn't grown by more than a few hundred since.

Lovell s Drug Store had the town s best comic book rack. Walking home from school, I would peer through the glass for new issues of *Little Lulu, Uncle Scrooge, Donald Duck, Batman* or *Superman*. Those were my favorites, but my stacks at home bulged with random copies of *Little Iodine, Space Cadet, Martin and Lewis, Roy Rogers, Howdy Doody* and others. Later I went through my *Archie/Buzzy* phase as I sought comics that would show me how to be a successful teenager.

There were no ECs in my collection, my parents had caught a glimpse of decomposing flesh as I perused one and pronounced them off-limits. Mostly I stuck to Dell comics, which came with a wholesomeness guarantee on the back cover, and the DC super-heroes who were unassailable national institutions. Every now and then a Harvey would creep in when the pickings were slim, but there was something uncomfortably homogenized about their house style

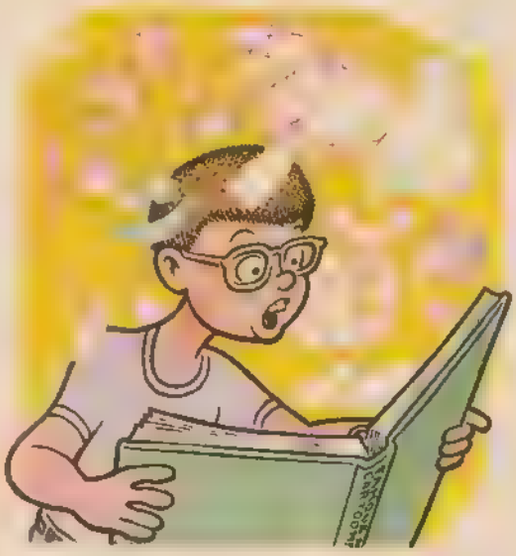
As a preacher's kid, I had to take note of spiritual content. When I was 6, my father tore up my copy of *Captain Marvel, Jr.* because he detected sacrilege in the exclamations of "Holy Moley!"

I thought this was a grossly unjust judgment, but there was no Court of Appeals to turn to.

As a rule, Dad's attitude toward my ever-growing comic collection was benign. He and Mom both encouraged my early scribbling impulses. Dad himself was a doodler: I have his college yearbook which he illustrated with early-Chic-Young-style images. He reported his life's ambition there: "to be the world s greatest cartoonist."

Life took him in other directions. He became a minister and, when not preaching actively, he supported himself as a social worker, a journalist and a photographer. By the time I was 20 he was dead, but he did get to see my first national cartoon sale, to the most wretched of all the *Mad* imitations, *Fooey*.

One summer afternoon during those Springville days, Dad said on impulse, ' Let s visit Tom Sims!'



Sims was writer of some of the post-Segar *Popeye* strips He lived in Ohatchee, another small Alabama town from which he produced a homespun syndicated column called *Ohatchee U.S.A.* He was the closest thing to a comic strip pro within driving distance.

So we drove to Ohatchee. My older brother wasn t along; it was just Dad and me. Just us two cartoonists We didn't telephone first; we asked directions from the local townfolk and pulled into Sims' driveway unannounced.

Sims was generous with his time and with compliments for my drawing samples. But something lay on the worktable of his assistant which I remember more vividly than the day's conversation. It was the set of textbooks for the *Famous Artists Cartooning Course*.

This course was prepared with the assistance of a stellar array of cartoonists from the fifties, most of whom are still active and remain stars today. Milton Caniff, Rube Goldberg, Al Capp, Willard Mullin and Virgil Partch were among the luminaries

The three large volumes comprising the 24 lessons were wondrous treasuries of instruction and lore. I lusted after them instantly.

Dad saw that I would not be satisfied until I had taken the course myself. But the price was out of his reach.

Time passed. At 13 I began to move out of Springville's orbit. By virtue of a scholarship, I was able to enroll at a private high school near Birmingham named Indian Springs.

At Indian Springs, great emphasis was placed on the development of a student's individual potentials. Note was taken of my cartooning bent, and soon I was decorating the pages of the school newspaper, designing posters for everybody-and-his-rival in the campus political campaigns, and rendering comic strips in French for my French class bulletin board.

One day Dr. Armstrong, the school's director, asked me what I would most wish for, given access to a magic genie or some such agent

"I'd like to take the *Famous Artists Cartooning Course*, ' I replied.

Nothing more was said then, but a few months later he called me to his office to tell me that a friend of the school, under guarantee of anonymity, had chosen to donate the money for me to take the course.

I still don t know the identity of my benefactor.

Many superficial aspects of the *FA* course are dated by today's standards, but the basics were solidly there. During the three years that I had worked through the 24 lessons, I had to root out lazy hab-

Mr Cruse has been given a free hand to express his thoughts and ideas in any manner he wishes within the scope of this publication. This column does not necessarily represent the editorial views of COMICS SCENE nor our philosophy The contents is © 1981 by Howard Cruse.

its accumulated from years of copying the surfaces of other artists drawings. I didn't complete the course a polished cartoonist, but the groundwork for a more professional approach and self-teaching techniques had been provided.

Milton Caniff's chapter fascinated me. In it, Caniff describes the embryonic development of his *Steve Canyon* strip. He also describes his typical workday and includes photos of his working space

Never had the process of actually *living* as a professional cartoonist been made so concrete for me

But when I first saw those pictures, I could never have imagined that within two years I would wander about Caniff s New York studio myself

It turns out that I had a serendipitous link to the famed creator of *Terry and the Pirates*. Coach Fred Cameron of the Indian Springs P.E. Department had once been a neighbor of Caniff's. Coach Cameron was taking the basketball team north to a tournament during the summer. Would I like to come up for the ride?

"I think I could arrange for you to meet Caniff," he said.

I won't try to describe my excitement. I had never met another cartoonist, much less one of Caniff's stature I felt as though I had been invited to rocket to another cosmos—the cosmos of my cartooning fantasies.

Perhaps meeting Caniff would trigger some set of events leading to a permanent place for me in that cosmos.

Caniff agreed to spend time with me, and asked to see samples of my work before I came. I gathered my recent drawings, cringing at flaws I had never noticed before. My lines were stilted, my inking clumsy, my compositions awkward, my concepts juvenile. Willing away apprehensions, I packaged them up and hoped for the best

I included a special strip drawn for the occasion, depicting Caniff's characters in a silly, *Mad*-style parody. I mailed the parcel to New York.

I received a courteous response from Caniff himself, declaring his interest in meeting me soon

So a station-wagon full of basketballers and me rolled northward on a brisk summer morning, they to dribble across their courts and I to pay starstruck homage to my hero Coach Cameron would be fully involved with his basketball exhibition during my New York stay, so I was to be on my own for four days, bedding down at the Sloane House YMCA by night and exploring Manhattan by day. On the appointed evening, Coach Cameron would pick me up, escort me to Caniff's home in Rockland County, and leave me to spend several hours in discourse with Caniff

As an additional treat, the cartoonist had arranged for me to lunch with himself and Sylvan Byck, comics editor at King Features, the following day at Sardi s.

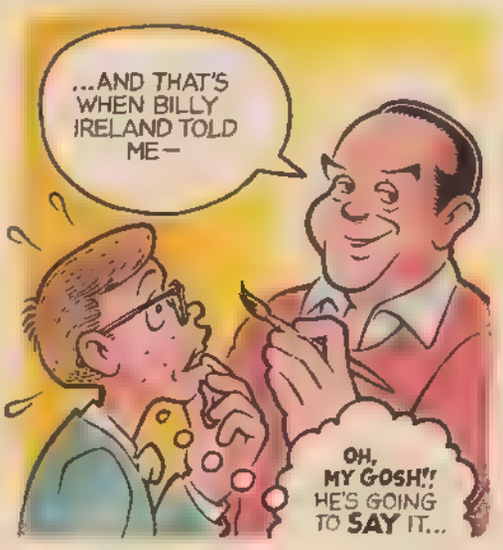
All went as planned. I found myself in a setting I had already memorized from the photos in my *Famous Artists* textbook. Caniff proved accessible and kind. I'm sure my visit disrupted a tight production schedule, but if he was restless to get down to serious work, it didn't show

I peered over his shoulder as he inked promotional drawings of *Steve Canyon*. I perused his huge library of reference materials, and reverently handled his stacks of old strips. I gushed about my favorite comics and my dreams. He cautioned patience and advised me to get all the schooling I could before trying to hop a freight bound for cartooning glory.

Details of our conversation are hazy now, but one fragment remains vivid. Whenever the story of Caniff's early career is recounted in print, reference is made to his quandry over whether to pursue acting or cartooning Asked for advice, his mentor Billy Ireland counseled, "Stick to your inkpots, kid. Actors don't eat regularly!"

That pithy counsel clearly had an impact, for Caniff has quoted it repeatedly It appeared in the *FA* course and in the edition of *Milton Caniff: Rembrandt of the Comic Strip* which I unearthed in the Birmingham library before my New York trip.

So I sat in his studio and he began the familiar anecdote. I felt a glow of special privilege: others might read it in print but I was to hear it spoken by the man himself



"Stick to your inkpots, kid. Actors don't eat regularly!" I could have recited it along with him, but it might have seemed presumptuous .

In these days when comic conventions regularly bring fans and their favorite artists together, it may be hard for younger readers to understand how overwhelming it could be for an aspiring cartoonist from Alabama to have this single opportunity during his youth to be in the presence of a major artist like Caniff My most idealized dreams were (in a considerably less ideal form) mundane reality for *Steve Canyon's* creator What was said was less important than the simple verification that one cosmos need not be separate from another, that people really do pass from childhoods spent yearning to adulthoods spent accomplishing.

At Sardi s the next day I ordered spaghetti. It was the only thing on the menu that I recognized. Sylvan Byck was more forbidding than Caniff His brusque frankness, birthright of New Yorkers, was intimidating to the ears of a youngster nurtured under the courtly umbrella of Southern delicacy.

Byck spoke the unadorned truth. He pronounced my sample drawings ' promising' but he permitted me no illusions that King Features was waiting in the wings with a syndication contract.

"These are the Big Leagues!" he growled, as the sandlot bunter squirmed uneasily before him.

But if he chose not to feed my illusions of instant grandeur, neither was Byck unfriendly. He treated me to a tour of the King Features offices, and I could return to Indian Springs having set foot in the true professional cartooning world. King Features' tiny copyright notice in the corner of a *Blondie* panel would never again seem so impersonal!

Over the following years, as I finished high school and negotiated several departments of Birmingham-Southern College before emerging as a theatre graduate, I would drop Caniff an occasional note He always responded with an encouraging reply.

Once he wrote that, when I was out of school, he perhaps could help me find a staff position in the cartoon field. A foot in the door. Maybe Byck would have something in the King Features office

His words were a gesture, not a promise. But I stored them away, a private insurance policy assuring that someone cared. If all else failed, Milton Caniff would be willing to help me.

1969 was a year of collapsing illusions for me. College had deflected me from cartooning into theatre, and I entered graduate school at Penn State on a playwriting fellowship

Then a writer s block paralyzed me and panic set in. I didn t know who I was, what I had to offer, where I wanted my life to lead me. I left Penn State three months after arriving

Squatting with other Alabama refugees in New York, I survived by doing paste-ups for typesetting companies while trying to launch a free-lance illustrating career on the side. I gathered a few drawing jobs, but most art directors spotted my unreadiness the moment I unzipped my portfolio

What savings I had melted fast as the summer of '69 heated up. By then I was living in a tiny Chelsea apartment. With no air-conditioning, it was useless to draw. The India ink invariably bled into the puddles of sweat from my forearms.

I remembered how in Alabama, the world of cartooning success symbolized by Milton Caniff's studio had seemed miraculously accessible. Now I was in

(Continued on page 64)

Me and My Phantom

Artist Sy Barry discusses life with the Phantom after 20 years and why the adventure strip has lasted for 45 years

PRINCE BUZABAL, WELCOME TO BANGALLA.
WELCOME ?! ARREST THAT MASKED MANIAC! HE KIDNAPPED ME... STARTED A RIOT IN MY PALACE!
Sy Barry 5/24
YOU'LL FACE CHARGES IN THE WORLD COURT. MANY NATIONS ARE EAGER TO SEIZE THEIR CROOKS YOU SHELTERED.. FOR PAY.
HERE ARE THE RECORDS.
I SUGGEST YOU SEND IN PARATROOPERS...
YES. TO RESTORE ORDER.
I'LL LEAD THE WAY. I WAS BORED WITH THE JOB ANYHOW.
WHEN THE PARATROOPERS ARRIVE...CROOKS AND GUARDS HAVE HAD AN ARMISTICE...
!!!!
??
NO ONE ELSE COULD TOUCH THEM. THEY'VE MISSED YOU.
YOU'RE AMAZING! CROOKS' HAVEN WAS AN IMPOSSIBLE MESS.
DIFFICULT... BUT NOT IMPOSSIBLE. HI, HERO, DEVIL!
© 1981 King Features Syndicate, Inc. World rights reserved
A DOZEN NATIONS WANT TO PRESENT MEDALS TO THE MYSTERIOUS MR. WALKER.*
CAN THEY MAIL THEM ?
I'M IN A HURRY. DIANA AND THE CHILDREN ARE WAITING.
*FOR THE GHOST WHO WALKS.
CONT'D

By JEFF STRELL

He is a survivor. To the African tribes he is the Ghost Who Walks. To the Jungle Patrol, he is the mysterious commander never seen, heard only via radio. To Diana, he is the embodiment of her dreams and her mate. To millions of readers around the world, he is The Phantom

Over 400 years ago, the comic strip tells us, a ship was attacked by pirates and the lone survivor was washed upon the African coast. Vowing to combat piracy and evil wherever he encountered it, the survivor submerged his true name and became the first Phantom. For the past 20 generations, a male descendant has always been trained and prepared to carry on the legacy, fighting injustice not only in the African jungles but around the world. To the African natives, he has always appeared invulnerable, never dying. "The Phantom is dead! Long live the Phantom!' they chant when the mantle of responsibility changes hands.

The Phantom adventure strip is also a survivor. Created in 1936 by Lee Falk, *The Phantom* still reigns today under the guidance of Falk and artist Sy Barry. Still a popular feature, the strip runs in hundreds of daily and Sunday newspapers in

ALL ART © 1981 King Features Syndicate

Sy Barry finishes the artwork on a Sunday strip He uses a bold style to tell the story, making the strip easy to read and follow.

the United States and is carried in dozens of newspapers around the world Barry has been drawing the strip since May of 1961 when artist Wilson McCoy died, and he has continued to draw the strip for the past 20 years.

Sy Barry sits in his newly-expanded home studio whose centerpiece is a huge utility table built to his own specifications by DC inker Joe Giella. Wildcats are poised in various positions on the pages of the many reference works spread about. A *Phantom* daily awaits completion on the drawing board. Barry begins to reminisce about his long career in the comics industry He began at DC Comics in the early 50s doing pencils and inks on their romance books During this time he his brother Dan and Murphy Anderson shared a studio in a loft in downtown Manhattan. Later, he went overseas to assist his brother on the *Flash Gordon* strip (which Dan continues today). He then returned to the states to do advertising work, and to submit a strip idea to the King Features Syndicate. It was while waiting for their response on that strip that they asked him to try his hand on the *Phantom*.

As he explains the new directions the comics industry has explored over the last two decades, Barry expresses a feeling of disillusionment, 'There s been an enormous trend over to humor strips The adventure strips, except for those that have been around for many years and are familiar to the public, have fallen by the wayside I d say that there are at least three new humor strips for every one new adventure strip '

Furthermore it seems that the audi ence for comic strips is dwindling The black and white images, frozen on newsprint, are no match for the living, moving color of the cathode ray tube. ' There was a time when comics were a vital part of the entertainment business and a vital part of everyone s life Even if the kids didn t read the sports, the news, or the editorials, they read the funnies But with the coming of television, well, there are just so many hours in a day. The working wife or husband, in some kind of commuting situation, is still able to read the newspaper and get a glance at the comic strips. Children, on the other hand, might get a chance to look at a comic strip in between commercials,' but no longer are the comics a primary source of their entertainment

Perhaps people do not have the time any more to indulge in a continuing fantasy or adventure story. Perhaps they do not want the burden of remembering the plot from day to day; they feel that they already have enough on their minds What they want from the funnies is just that—a quick laugh. One moment it s there, the next it's gone. Humor strips, because of their brevity, and because of their function as one-shot tension relievers, are more palatable to the newspaper publishers than action strips.

> "It's not a violent strip. It doesn't rely on murder and sex to help it survive."

A notable exception to this grim trend is the *Phantom*. Just as the hero has reigned over the jungle for 400 years the strip has survived in the newspaper battlefield for almost half a century. And it is prospering. *The Phantom* is carried in over 600 domestic newspapers. It can also be read in Brazil, China, Australia and Scandinavia. Every year, ABC renews its option to produce a Phantom animated show (which Filmation retains the rights to); the scripts for the first 13 weeks have already been written. There has also been talk of a full-length *Phantom* movie

How does Barry account for the popularity of the Phantom? 'I think it has survived because of its uniqueness. It's not a violent strip. It doesn't rely on murder and sex and that kind of element to help it survive It is a fantasy strip which takes place in the present day. It's done in a somewhat light vein, and yet done somewhat surrealistically. You ve got realistic characters who feel pain, have the same emotions everyone else has, go through the same problems everyone else has But it's done with a little bit of the fantasy and escape element that people look for to get away from the violence of our time, from the difficulties of our time

This is essentially the same philosophy that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby used to propel the Marvel Comics Group into the big leagues in the early 60s They realized that they were no longer living in a black and white world. They knew that to believe in super-heroes, even for the 15 minutes it takes to read a comic book, involved a jump of faith. But to believe in invulnerable superheroes involved a *big* jump, one that most readers were no longer willing to make People were finding a plethora of new problems, both internal and external, with which they constantly had to battle. It was comforting to know that the once-unbeatable heroes now had to wrestle with a few psychological demons of their own.

Like the Marvel characters, the Phantom has done some growing up in the past few decades. Two years ago, in fact, the Phantom became a husband. Summoning up his courage, he was able to get beyond the words "will you," and finally add 'marry me." (When he spoke these four words, Diana, his fiancee, keeled over and fainted into the Phantom's arms.) They were married very shortly thereafter. And a year and a half after the wedding they had twins, a girl named Helouise and a boy named Kit The boy, named after the Phantom in his civilian identity, is the next in line in the Phantom dynasty

The Phantom family now lives in their tree-house, a structure that rests upon a

FOR THOSE WHO CAME IN LATE:
WHAM
IT..IT.. (SOB) WON'T COME OFF!
THE SKULL RING:
KNOWN AND FEARED BY EVIL-DOERS EVERYWHERE ... WORN ON THE PHANTOM'S HARD RIGHT FIST...
(IT NEVER WILL)

THE GOOD MARK RING..WORN ON THE PHANTOM'S LEFT FIST (CLOSER TO THE HEART)...
DR AXEL'S HOSPITAL
FALK & BARRY 7-24
HE WHO BEARS THIS MARK WILL ALWAYS BE PROTECTED..BY THE PHANTOM.
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network of enormous trees. Though it is made entirely of wood, it resembles a stone castle when viewed from a distance. Diana is the family commuter; her work for the U.N. requires her to drive 25 miles every morning and evening in her small land rover. While she is out working for her living, the Phantom stays home to mind the kids, and to keep an eye out for any trouble in the jungle.

Apart from the modernization of the characters and their surroundings, Barry's Phantom shares another important trait with the early Marvel books. This is the outright enthusiasm Barry shows toward his artwork and toward the stories he illustrates. Few professionals who have been working at the same job for 20 years are still able to speak of their craft with the animation and the delight that Barry exhibits. "Certain plot lines have really caught my fancy and have kept me really excited with the story, in fact not even wanting to see the story end. Particularly, the wedding sequence was a very exciting thing to do. It had none of the violence and the horror, the awful bloody situations that we ll see in other medias. It had a beautiful story, it was developed very well well-timed well paced It built up to a crescendo so that when the wedding finally took place, everyone was just waiting for the preacher to say 'I pronounce you husband and wife' Every moment on that was just a joy. We were also introducing *all* of the characters that we were using throughout my lifetime on The Phantom [including Mandrake, another Lee Falk creation]. Really a lovely, lovely story."

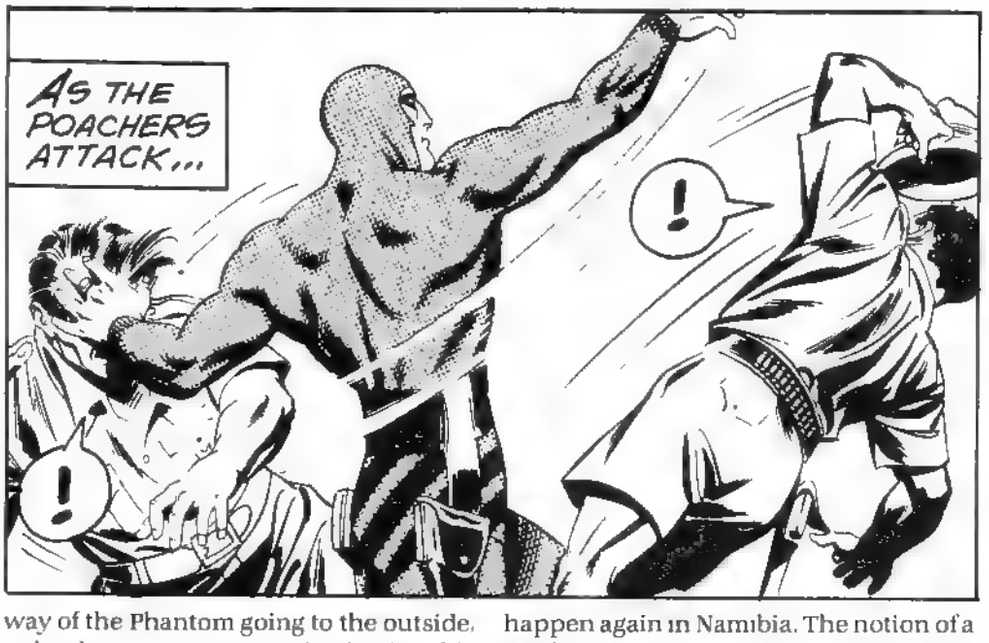
Over the years popular assumptions change, and the *Phantom* has had to change with them Particularly problematic to the strip, however, has been the conception of Africa as the Dark Continent In 1936, the *Phantom* reader had little difficulty picturing Africa as a mysterious, primitive unknown land. Today we know better. With African countries supplying a large percentage of our oil, with Zimbabwe and Namibia making headlines with their quest for independence, with South Africa contructing massive nuclear power plants, the continent has become a very real force in our affairs It is becoming more difficult to imagine a Phantom Country, completely secluded from the outside world, whose natives believe guns and airplanes to be instruments of the gods.

The seclusion of the Phantom's land is essential to the interest of the strip, if the natives understood modern technol ogy, the Phantom legend would be greatly diminished. But as the space program has ended fictional speculation about the first moon flight and the first space station, so the media seems to have destroyed the myth of Africa as a primal, unexplored land. It is difficult to imagine that the Phantom Country has remained untouched by changes in the rest of the continent

Barry comments on the Phantom Country: "I think because of its geographical location it has been able to remain remote from the rest of the growing progress that s going on in Africa Because of its inability to be reached very easily it's been able to maintain its own quiet and undisturbed way of life. Civilization is brought to the Phantom domain only by way of the Phantom going to the outside, or by short wave communication into his cave He s also linked up to the Jungle Patrol and that s another means of his getting information on what's going on outside So he isn't closed off The tribes are kept away from civilization but he's kept pretty well abreast of it "

This suggests a kind of deception. In order for the Phantom to remain powerful, the natives must be kept innocent of modern ways. Though the Phantom has only the good of his people in mind, his legend rests on the fact that he does not permit the natives to gain any knowledge of his true identity. Barry feels that the Phantom devised this concept purposely in order "to create the illusion not that he s a god, but that he is beyond reproach that his word is final. He had to establish some kind of irrevocable symbol that [the natives] could not question They see him as a ghost who walks, a man who s lived for many hundreds of years They see him as someone who is not just far above them but far above any human being "

This theme has been explored most recently in the film *Apocolypse Now*. The movie vividly portrays the dangers inherent in trying to play God This practice is especially dangerous in a land ruled by apartheid, with the many being led by the few. The situation in Africa is unstable, but the trend is toward turning authority over to the blacks It happened in Zimbabwe, and there are hopes that it will happen again in Namibia. The notion of a single white man ruling thousands of black tribesmen is fast becoming an archaic one



How have Barry and Falk been able to cope with this situation? The Phantom has, or, I should say, the creator of the *Phantom* has turned over a good deal of the authority to black leadership. In fact the new colonel of the Jungle Patrol Colonel Worobu is black. The only one who commands over him is the Phantom, the commander in chief. Maybe

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The art on these pages shows how well Barry can handle action, information and simple pleasures

someday there will be a black commander we don t know yet

Of course the 60s brought about questioning do we blindly follow our leaders? Because of that I think Lee has wisely broken away from the blind acceptance the natives used to show Lee is now beginning to put blacks into very important authoritative positions In fact several black presidents presided at the wedding and performed the ceremonies So I think in most cases he *has* broken away from the old ideas. He has kept some of the old fear that has kept the natives in close check But very little It comes through only when a native is in a modern situation and then sees the Phantom mark Only then, the trepidation comes over his face and he starts sweating. Well, that s because of the old legend The Phantom has been around for so many years and the natives know not to mess with him

In summarizing his two decades on the *Phantom*, Barry notes that the strip has become more concerned with family living I think it s begun to reunify what has become in our culture the nuclear family, begun to reunify the family concept Now the Phantom has not only the responsibility of his domain, he also has a responsibility as a father and a husband

He sees a trend in his artistic style away from Wilson McCoy's semi-comic portrayals toward his more realistic, photographic illustrations. I think the greatest change is the fact that I feel I ve developed my own style I've learned to live with my own style, and I m happy with my own technique I think I've grown out of the need to use somebody else's technique to explain a certain area in my drawing It took 20 years to develop the confidence to accept my style I can now say This is *you* Sy You re an individual. you re an entity in yourself accept the technique you have and live with it

Perhaps this is what separates the survivors from all the rest in the competitive comics industry the will to grow and to change and also the ability to come to terms with one's art The pride that Sy Barry takes in his work gives the strip that extra quality that enables it to last

The last two decades have passed quickly for Barry. "I think working on this type of strip we have so much leeway, we can do so many things with a character I think this has kept it so interesting that really the years have flown –they have not been tedious, not by any means

And the future looks surprisingly bright. The downswing in adventure strips is only temporary, Barry feels He predicts a rapid recovery, based in part on the current fascination with science fiction films But just as important, he says, is the caliber of the few adventure strips being drawn today. "I think the quality of artwork for those remaining adventure strips is superior to 20 years ago There's an enormous improvement in the amount of talent being displayed I just wish that it was getting a better play that this was the era of the adventure strip

But it ll come back. So long as this quality maintains itself, I really feel that adventure strips will come back. Because of some of the science-fiction films that have been produced, the public has begun looking at adventure stories again They don t just want to look at something and laugh, they want to be entertained the way they used to be by the suspense strips I think we ll return to a regrowth of adventure strips

And from the mouth of a survivor, these words carry real weight. Perhaps there is hope for our imagination, for our sense of wonder. Perhaps the Phantom will remain for another 400 years. ■

Guest Spot

The Triumph of Comics Fandom

By PAUL LEVITZ

Turn back the clock 20 years: there are no fanzines about comics, much less a magazine like COMICS SCENE that is actually available on newsstands across the country; there are no comic shops, no stores that carry back issues of comics in anything but a "Used Comics Two For A Dime" box, no comic conventions, not even monthly gatherings of dealers to hawk their comic treasures; there are no credits for the creative people who put together the comics, never a clue as to their identities or tastes beyond the most superficial; and the only way an editor will know what you think of his comic is if you send in a letter to a comic that doesn't even have a letters page.

It all sounds so unreal. But try to put yourself in the place of that unreal comics fan, that rarity of the summer of 1961. There is no Marvel Age of Comics yet, no *Fantastic Four #1* in the hands of anyone but the printers. There are no underground comics, no ground-level small presses pouring out the creativity of artists and writers whose work don't fit the mainstream of comics. In fact, there is precious little but the over powering mainstream: National Periodical Publications, Inc., the company that took comics out of their name because it was too embarassing to have on the elevator directory, and their sister company, Independant News Company, which distributes not only the Superman-DC line but also the tiny Marvel and American Comics Group lines.

There are comics fans. A few. Very far between. And they're just learning how to talk to each other, thanks to the first letters pages that actually printed long letters and full addresses. Science fiction fanzine pioneer Julie Schwartz has just introduced the startling new style in comics letters pages (or at least new since the short-lived E.C. era), and it's forming the first strands of a communication network for comics fandom.

Slip into the mind of one of those early comics fans; imagine with him, (for there were few women who were comics fans, what an ideal world might be for the comics fan. Imagine a world where the opinions of comics fans might be listened to, at least occasionally. Imagine a world where comics fans might have the opportunity to get together, at least in rare conventions like the scence fiction fans have. Imagine a world where there might be a magazine that would have features on comics.

In short, imagine a dream reality that falls far short of the achieved reality of today's comics fandom.

No comics fan of the early 1960s would have dreamed, much less expected, comic book publishers to devote much of their sales effort and editorial emphasis to their wishes. Nor would they have imagined a world in which most of the employees of the comic book publishers were former comics fans. And anyone who suggested that it might be possible to put out better quality material on a limited press run basis for the comic fans alone would certainly have been locked up as a raving lunatic.

The dreams of the early 1960s were ones that were brought to life in the next few years: a few conventions, mainly on a regional basis with one convention per year per major region (the Northeast's New York Comic Art Convention, Houston Con for the Southwest, San Diego for the West Coast, and so on); a few fanzines with some news about what might happen in upcoming comics or what might have happened in the history of comics. And here and there an editor listened to a fan suggestion . . . Marvel even sent No-Prizes to fans, empty envelopes but recognition that your views had been heard and noted. (Or that you had caught them in a *rare* mistake!)

That was as far as the dreams went. Even when the first fans made the crossing to professional status, the dreams went unchanged. They were too few, too far between again. The system had been the system for so many years that it was impossible to change.

Even at the half-way point between then and now, the system was still strong. Marvel only released occasional news to fanzines because of the constant battle of a couple of fans-turned-pro against the conventional wisdom that fan sales were too small in number to justify letting them have the information in advance of the regular readers. Comic companies trashed original artwork, because there was no use for it. And most of the people who worked in the comic book industry didn't read a comic unless they were specifically paid to as part of their jobs.

You've noticed that that's changed haven't you? It's hard to tell when the old system raised the white flag and surrendered, but it certainly wasn't all that long ago. Maybe five years . . . maybe six . . . possibly seven. But how it's all changed since then.

The initial idea for a new comic is probably conceived by a writer who published his own fanzine not too long ago, or who still has an old convention badge or button rattling around in a drawer of his desk. It's read by an editor who has just spent an afternoon giving an interview to a fanzine. It's assigned to an artist the writer once collaborated with on a series for a small press publication. The finished product is passed down the hall to a former fan whose job is dealing with fanzines and comic collector shops. He reads it, calls a distributor whose business used to consist of four cartons of very old comics that he sold by mail from an office in his basement. The distributor looks over his previous month's orders, measures the popularity of the writer and the artist with fandom, considers the concept of the comic, and estimates an order measured in the thousands of copies. Press releases are mailed to the fanzines, complete with copies of the first issue in advance, and an offer to arrange for additional material from the artist. At the summer's major comics conventions the writer and artist make special appearances, appearing right after slide shows sent around by the film studios to

build enthusiasm for their latest fantasy films. Sitting at home, the fan has the opportunity to read thousands of words about the creation of the comic, its con cept, the relationship of its writer, artist, editor and even letterer, before making up his mind whether or not to buy the first issue. If he does decide to, he certainly knows the exact day it will come in at his comic shop, which diligently stocks every comic published and dozens of different comic related paperbacks and hardcovers

Has it struck you yet? We won And we won a victory beyond our wildest dreams By being in the right place at the right time, comics fandom has reshaped the comics industry to meet its needs, desires and even whims

It s not important to discuss what killed the old system. Maybe it was televi sion, as so many claimed for so long Maybe it was the disappearance of the 'Mom & Pop" candy store, the traditional outlet for comics as well as magazines Maybe it was the invention of the shopping center and the convenience store Maybe even the writers and artists lost track of their readers tastes and lost the vast majority of the public, and the ones who stuck with comics inherited a smaller but more responsive medium

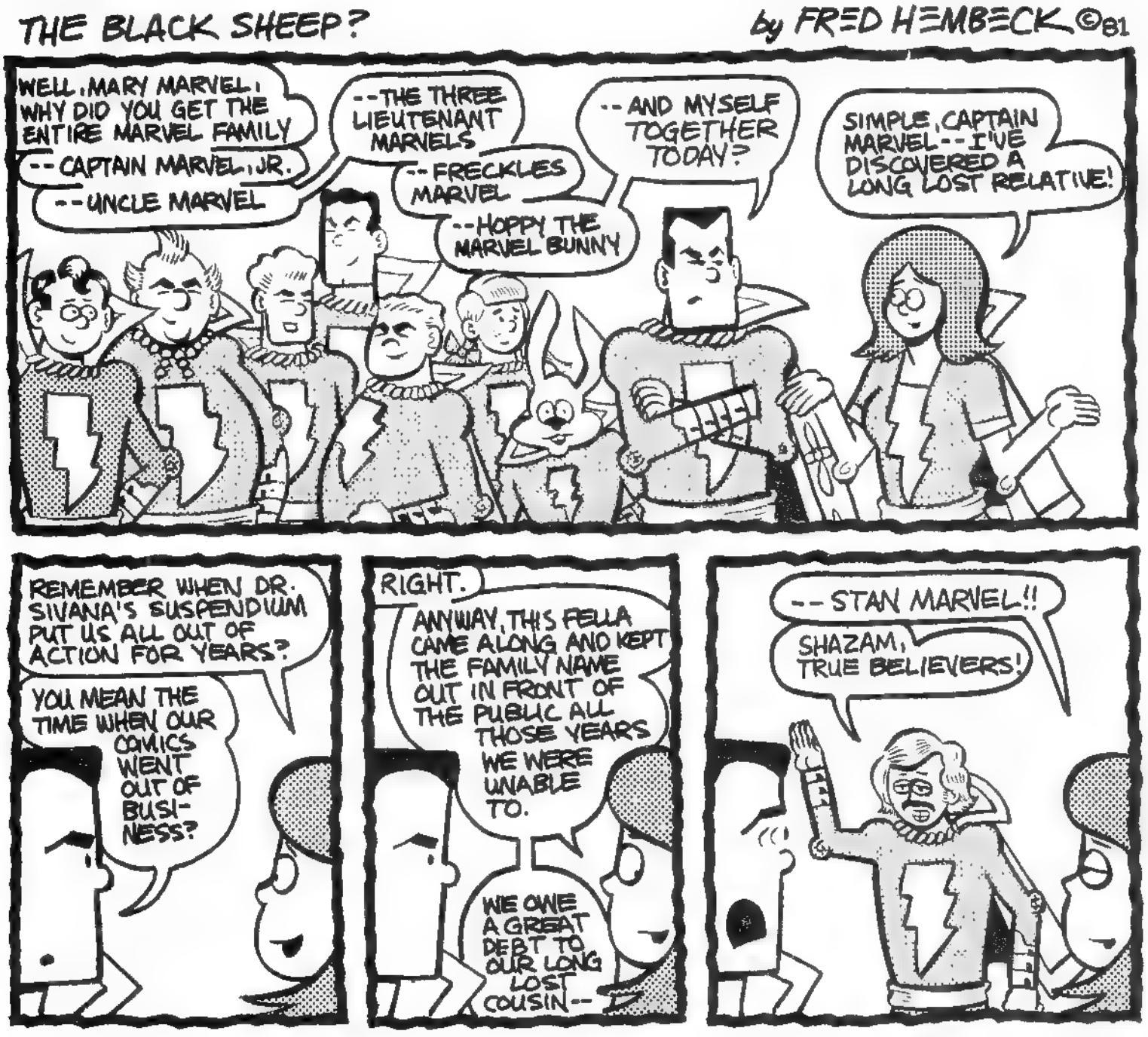
It's not important to discuss what a shock it was to realize that we won The old professionals of the comics industry, the ones who cut their eyeteeth on typewriters and drawing boards as we were being born, saw their rules all changed Some welcomed it, and took the talent that only years of experience can hone and thrilled in using it to entertain an audience that responded. Some are only now learning that the sales to comic shops and specialty distributors aren't irrelevant, or "phony' sales. And the new professionals who came in during the change, those first fans who made it into the industry, are seeing the 'fannish" passions that were knocked out of them in their first years in the field rekindled

We won. Whisper it softly, don t shock yourself

We won. Shout it at the top of your lungs. There's no one left to shock but yourself

For better or worse, a majority of the comics published today are produced by comic fans for the entertainment of comic fans. The two publishers who represent 75 to 80 percent of the comics industry are conciously aiming their efforts directly at the fan market as their chief area of growth, and the other publishers are looking on with envy. The professionals whose work or ideas can't find expression at the major publishers are finding daring new small publishers willing to take changes ... and that willingness exists because there are enough fans out there that it is no longer a great risk to publish a good comic. The only risk is in

(Continued on page 65)


THE BLACK SHEEP?
by FRED HEMBECK ©81
WELL, MARY MARVEL, WHY DID YOU GET THE ENTIRE MARVEL FAMILY
--CAPTAIN MARVEL, JR.
--UNCLE MARVEL
--THE THREE LIEUTENANT MARVELS
--FRECKLES MARVEL
--HOPPY THE MARVEL BUNNY
--AND MYSELF TOGETHER TODAY?
SIMPLE, CAPTAIN MARVEL--I'VE DISCOVERED A LONG LOST RELATIVE!
REMEMBER WHEN DR. SIVANA'S SUSPENDIUM PUT US ALL OUT OF ACTION FOR YEARS?
YOU MEAN THE TIME WHEN OUR COMICS WENT OUT OF BUSI-NESS?
RIGHT.
ANYWAY, THIS FELLA CAME ALONG AND KEPT THE FAMILY NAME OUT IN FRONT OF THE PUBLIC ALL THOSE YEARS WE WERE UNABLE TO.
WE OWE A GREAT DEBT TO OUR LONG LOST COUSIN--
--STAN MARVEL!!
SHAZAM, TRUE BELIEVERS!

Marvel

(Continued from page 18)

cracker. Galton explains there will be some story modifications made and the center section of the film will feature six or seven musical pieces from some of the most popular rock groups of the last 25 years. Choosing and producing the music will be the reknowned George Martin and Al Brodax (*Yellow Submarine*) will be the producer. Designing the look of the film will be Allan Aldrich

The final area Marvel is currently involved in is the production of a Broadway show based on the middle-aged years of Captain America. It's a musical and Galton hears the first act is terrific. Marvel previously mounted a one night stage show at Carnegie Hall in 1972. The show was highly-touted as something flashy but it failed to live up to its promises.

Looking Ahead

Today Marvel Comics Group is calling itself the Marvel Entertainment Group and they are actively looking fo new ways to exploit their characters. They are hoping for success but as the company expands, it seems less attention is being paid to the comic books which spawned this growing company. With books, magazines and toys, the Marvel super-heroes are being seen all around the world but the core of their success is being concentrated into the growing fan marketplace. Galton says he will not turn down anyone wishing to sell Marvel comics but, with a growing percentage of sales concentrated in the direct sales category, the company will more than ever be at the mercy of their fans And these fans have shown in the past to have a cyclic interest in superheroes and space fantasy; Shooter claims to have new titles on the drawing boards that will feature soldiers, and a western hero, Caleb Hammer, was introduced last year as a one shot. The much-talked-about romance series is no longer mentioned at their monthly press conferences, so, for now, Marvel is relying solely on their super-heroes.

Should the market change its mind and desire the return of monsters, true crime stories or funny animals, Marvel may be left in a precarious position. And Shooter is left with a line of titles and a complement of editors that must still strive to avoid repetitive stories, similar covers, and rehashed goings-on.

But none of that seems to faze the current creative staff at Marvel Comics. They are enjoying an unusually lush period of growth and experimentation and are riding high on expectations for future success. The House of Ideas is barely taking the time to eat their own birthday cake because, as usual, there is too much to do and not enough hours in the day to get it all down. And at Marvel, that's business as usual. ■

Loose Cruse

(Continued from page 57)

New York where cartoons were drawn and published by the hundreds every day; but the chasm separating me from that world appeared unbridgeable

I thought of Caniff, and telephoned him to remind him of my existence. When I described my plight, he said, 'Send me some of your stuff and I'll show it to my agent. Maybe he can help.'

So I bundled my recent sample strips along with my plays short stories and everything else I had that might bear evidence of creativity. I mailed them all to Caniff.

Nothing ever came of that gambit except a fragment of wisdom. Months passed, and during those months, my childhood dreams of easy fame died a quiet death.

I saw that I had invested Caniff with a magical power that he did not possess—a power to provide me with a foothold in the cartooning world that I had not earned by doing the work it takes to become genuinely skilled.

Caniff has powers that border on the magical, powers of imagination embodied in his decades spent creating first *Terry*, then *Steve Canyon*. But he was not the genie who could grant me my boyhood wishes

So I ultimately wrote and asked for the return of my work. It arrived from his agent with no comment. I suppose I must have seemed ungrateful in the process; Caniff has never chosen to respond to the occasional letters I've sent since.

I felt an umbilical cord to long-held fantasies being severed as I packed up and moved back South It was all over for me, I thought. A certified failure at 25.

But gradually, old impulses reasserted themsleves. I started over, did some relearning, approached drawing from some new angles. And for better or worse, here I am in New York again. I've been here since 1977, and this time I've carved out a niche.

I missed out on a skyrocket career, but so far I'm earning a living at the craft which I've loved and respected since I first clutched a Crayola

Now COMICS SCENE has asked me to write a column about my feelings thoughts, and adventures as a practitioner of this craft, which at its best can be the most accessible of art forms

I don t pretend to be an artist of Caniff's stature. The chaotic jumble of paper scraps where I work scarcely deserves to be called a "studio.'

But if I invite you into my bejumbled world, perhaps something will click for a few new fledgling artists for whom actually surviving as a professional cartoonist still seems an unattainable fantasy

I daydream a lot, but my life is definitely no fantasy.

Welcome to whatever it is. ■

Heavy Metal

(Continued from page 49)

that gets support staff from the *National Lampoon* offices and is ultimately subordinate to their schedules

An additional 30,000 copies of the magazine were printed the month the *HM* movie opened around the country. A two-hour animated advertisement isn t a bad way to make a splash. Now that the magazine has begun to refocus their attentions and is beginning to shape up into the magazine it promised to become four years ago, the company looks ready to try new things

"One thing I would like to get into is that we want to do special issues. We did an H.P. Lovecraft issue and we did a rock issue Both were nice but I don't thunk they were terribly strong. I'd like to do another rock issue perhaps, and I want to do an end of the-world issue, which is an idea coming from *Metal Hurlant*. The Europeans have been working in the styles that American comic artists are unaccustomed to, that's because they have been used to doing just code-approved comics,' Simmons-Lynch says.

"So we found that for the most part, the Europeans are doing work on a different plane, a higher plateau from the American artists, which is not to downgrade the American artists, some of whom are just as good, if not better, than the European artists'

As far as former editor White is concerned, Simmons-Lynch says that he is always welcome at the magazine. However after being named consultant, and after having the title become a part of the masthead, White has had little to do with the magazine. He has done only one story-Americanization for the magazine and was editing a lengthy interview with Will Eisner when this interview was conducted

For Mogel, the magazine has shaped up very close to his dreams now that he has first and final say. For Simmons-Lynch, who spent some time between high school and college at the *National Lampoon* and went on to fetch coffee at *Heavy Metal* once she decided school wasn t enough, things have turned out better than imagined. Of course, her mother doesn't understand it but she doesn't fit into the demographic breakdowns anyway.

Finally, and most importantly, *Heavy Metal* has turned into a magazine that is pretty to look and, for those wishing to indulge, getting better to read with each passing issue. All the magazine needs to do now is figure out a way to expand their base while retaining the loyal core of readers. It's not perfect yet, especially with silly things like "Rock Opera,' but it's getting there as exemplified by Workman's "Materlaine' in the August issue.

With any luck at all, by their fifth birthday, everyone will be happy. ■

Guest Spot

Continued from page 63)

measuring whether or not your editorial judgment of what a good comic is matches the view of fandom assembled.

The structure of fandom is mammoth, complex, and weaving itself tighter constantly. Hundreds of comic shops exist, almost all owned by former comic fans . . . or current comic fans. Fanzines multiply, divide and clone themselves. Conventions are such a commonplace that attendance falls and interest slackens because they are too frequent. More and more places exist for comic art to be published, more and more people are able to make their living in comics one way or another, and its all happening so fast it makes you dizzy to watch.

It's important that we don't forget that we won. And it's equally important that we remember that we won without a battle plan, a strategy, a tactic or even a weapon, except love of comics and dreams of how good comics could be. Because now that we've won, we can't afford to forget those dreams.

If the triumph of fandom is to have any meaning, it can't stop here and let the dreams be forgotten. It must begin again, with a reshaping of what comics are into what they can be. For all that the structure of the comics industry has changed, for all that there are new outlets for comic art, for all the opportunity for input by the fans that now exists, the traditional comics publishers have changed their product very little. Perhaps stories have grown a bit more sophisticated, the art a bit more complex, the themes more mature. But since the debut of *Conan*, several years before the triumph of fandom, there has been no new genre introduced into the major publishers' lines . . . no radically new titles . . . no new formats designed for better reproduction or printing permitting greater quality graphics. Some of these are about to happen, it's true, and others will undoubtedly follow, but it is the job of fandom to keep dreaming, keep leading, keep pushing on to the unknowable, unattainable future. Especially now that we have attained a bit of the future that always seemed unattainable before. ■

Editor's Note: For those who don't know, Paul Levitz has been a comics fan for nearly 20 years. He is currently Manager of Business Affairs at DC, a position reached after serving as an Assistant Editor, Editor and Editorial Coordinator. Paul is also one of DC's most respected writers and currently scripts the Huntress *and* Legion of Super-Heroes. *His fannish days saw him as editor of* The Comic Reader, *reshaping it into a leading fanzine and once the authoritative news source in fandom. A charter member of NYAPA, Paul also found time to edit many of Phil Seuling's Comic Art Convention program books.*

Creating Comics

(Continued from page 38)

downs. Some artists don't even want that; they just want the plot and they'll pace it and do whatever they want. I prefer to do as tight a plot as I can because I like to have as much control as I can. If Don thinks it should be paced differently, he'll call up and we'll discuss it. And the plot goes off to him and he draws it.

"I will write the dialogue [based on the returned pencilled pages] and Al reads it over. When I was first over at Marvel, and was somebody new, it was like, 'Who is this guy?' and my first few scripts were more heavily edited. As soon as they saw you can put words together in a coherent form, they tend to leave you alone unless you do something glaringly stupid—which everyone does at some time."

DeMatteis values a good writer-artist relationship, typified by those he has enjoyed with Perlin and with comics veteran Gil Kane, current artist on *Conan*. "He's a great story-teller," DeMatteis remarks about Kane. "If there was an artist I have loved in comics all through the years, it would be him."

And Kane isn't why DeMatteis is leaving *Conan* after just under a year. "Every Marvel book has its own continuity. With most, you can still build on that, and you have a future to work with. With *Conan*, you don't have a future. There have already been stories of his past, present and future. Roy Thomas did all the adaptations. There aren't that many places to go and you have a chronology to follow so Conan had to go x,x,x and x. Any place you take him, there had already been a story that had him there, and you have to write around that, and then mention that you go back six years and see what's been done. That, to me, is a real pain. I didn't enjoy that; it became a little cage," DeMatteis says.

To DeMatteis and to most of the other writers in the business, the real pleasure comes from developing entertaining stories. Part of the enjoyment comes from the artist-writer relationship, other parts come from exploring the depths of the existing characters or creating brand new ones. The greatest pleasure comes from creating new characters, either supporting cast for an established series, or a brand new series, offering a whole new set of possibilities and realms to examine. DeMatteis had a lot of fun with the creation of the "Creature Commandos" for Wein's *Weird War Tales* but his most enjoyable writing has been on the "I, Vampire" series in *House of Mystery*.

"Len gave me the title and I built a series around it," he recalls. "I would say, 'should I go left or go right?' And he'd say, 'Go left!' And it went very easily, because we think along the same lines. I wasn't confined, that was really a pleasure; I got a lot of fun out of that. My major regret when I left DC was that I had to stop writing that series; it was just beginning to get where I wanted it to be."

The hardest work, it seems, for a writer is keeping things fresh and not repeating gimmicks, tricks, and schtick—especially in a series that has been around for years. Writers have sometimes gotten into debates over reusing a gimmick they remember from their comic reading days or trying to use a fresh answer to the same problem. Of course, the fun is also in the resolution to such problems.

It's not easy being a comic writer and everyone who has done it for a living has indicated the strong need for some form of diversion—in order to retain their sanity. DeMatteis, for example, is trying to sell some short stories in prose form and has reviewed records for *Rolling Stone*. Many others, like Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway try and write for movies or television, expanding their talents when they can.

"After doing super-heroes month after month, you feel a desperate need to do something else," DeMatteis explains. "Working in comics has helped my sense of story structure and what makes a good plot has improved. So now I can go back to things I wrote three or four years ago, stuff that didn't come together for one reason or another and I can apply some intelligent story telling to it and it'll all come together.

"You have to do something else, for sheer sanity's sake." ■

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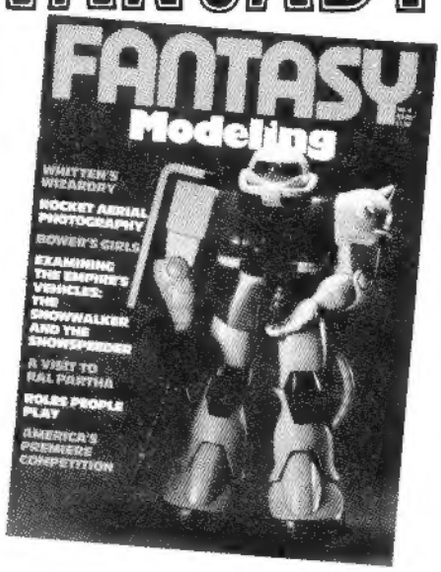

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THAT'S THE GUY I SPENT YEARS HATING--BEING JEALOUS OF!! I-I AIN'T EVEN WORTH HIS LITTLE PINKY!
17

Joe Sinnott

DON BLUTH STUDIOS: Don Bluth and his co-workers left Walt Disney Studios over a year ago to begin working on their own projects. They are now laying claim to being the best animation studio in America and to prove it, they are doing a lavish adaptation of the children's classic *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of Nihm.* United Artists was impressed enough with what they saw this past summer to agree to distribute the film as their big summer 1982 offering. David Hutchison takes us on an exclusive tour of the facilities and the people of this new house of ideas.

JOE SINNOTT: He's the professional's professional. His inks have graced almost every major comic character Marvel Comics has produced in the past 20 years. Recently he got his chance to show us what he can do with Superman. Contributor Sam Maronie offers an enlightening profile on Sinnott and his career in and out of comics.

Superman II

DAVID AND LESLIE NEWMAN have been closely associated with the scripts for both *Superman* movies and have been signed by Warner Brothers to come up with adventures for a third film. They are also working separately on characters like the Shadow and Sheena, Queen of the Jungle. The writing couple talk about the movies, the comics and what it takes to properly transform a comic character into a movie star.

PLUS Sue Adamo gives us a look at the *Gilchrist Brothers* and why they love the Muppets so much . . . *John Byrne* is in the Guest Spot . . . Around the World focuses on England's most unique creation—*Judge Dredd* . . . Howard Cruse profiles cartoonist Marv Tannenberg . . . Mike Flynn, credited for creating the fandom for the *Legion of Super-Heroes* writes about the rise and fall of Legion fandom . . . and of course a few surprises and features.

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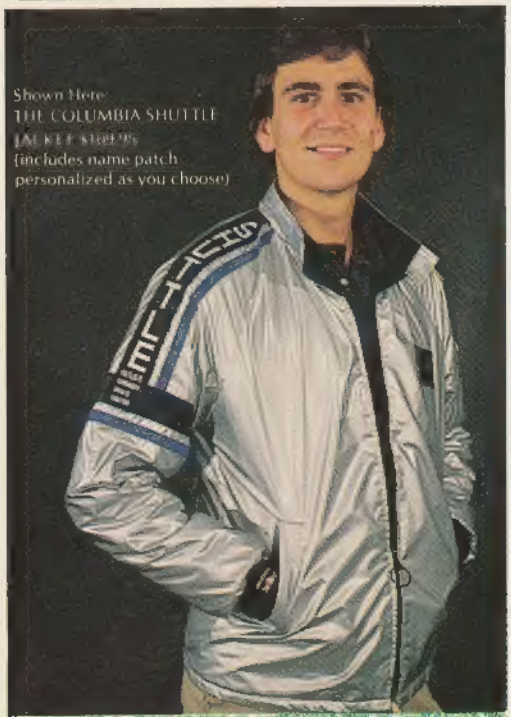

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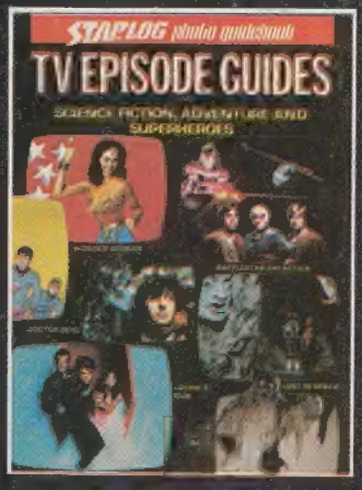

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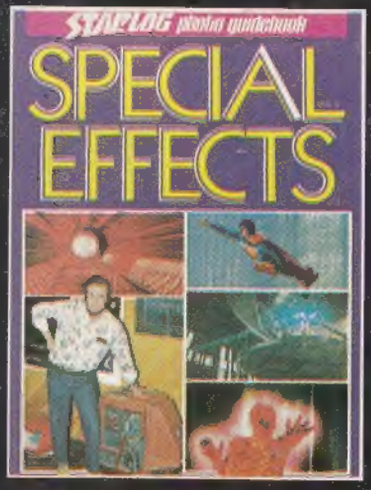

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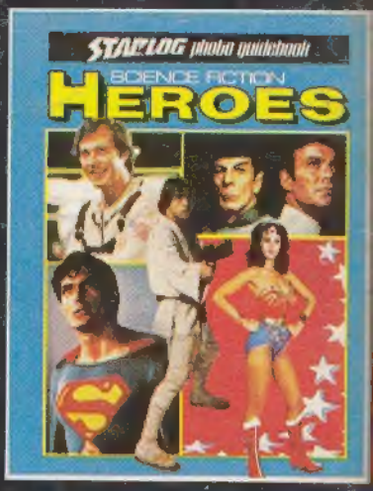

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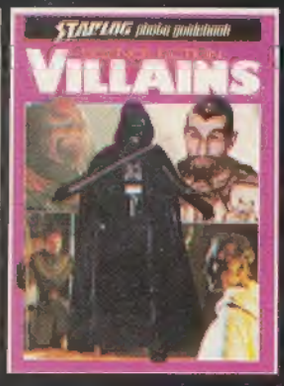

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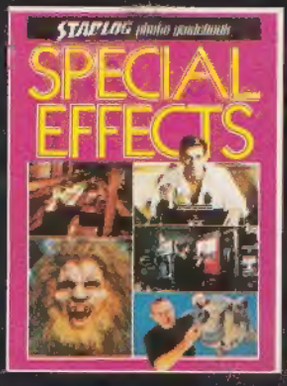

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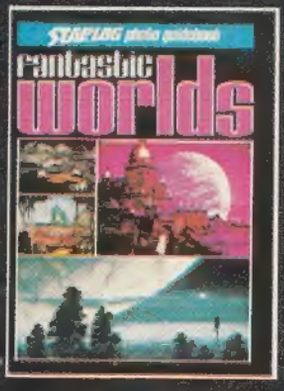

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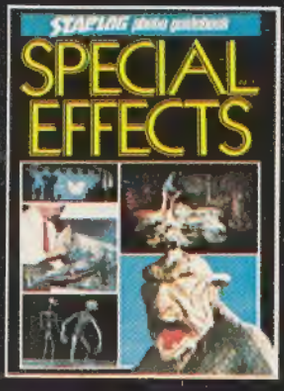

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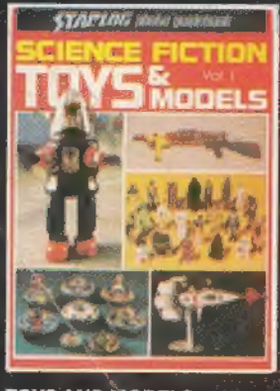

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